

# VRTAC-QM YEAR TWO ANNUAL EVALUATION

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Year Two Annual Evaluation Report

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH FOUNDATION

INTERWORK INSTITUTE

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Appendix A: Current QM Topic Area Logic Models

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### A. Formative Evaluation Highlights:

- ⚙ The Center continues to effectively implement the multiple theoretical frameworks guiding its operation and evaluation. Center inputs are on track and more aligned to meet needs.
- ⚙ Assessment processes and tools continue to become available and crosswalks are mapping them to the Center logic models/menus of service to examine alignment, utility, and overlap.
- ⚙ Somewhat belied by the national needs assessment in Year 1 but evidenced by the incoming referrals and requests for high-volume targeted TA and more notably intensive TA, it is clear there is a high need for TA at all levels and that affirms the value of a management practices-focused TA Center.

### B. Training and Universal TA Highlights:

- ⚙ Common themes included a preference for onsite, in-person trainings when possible, and appreciation for the use of examples to make the material accessible and relevant. As demonstrated by the ratings, trainings were well-received, and comments elucidate that further. Across all courses, training participants provided strong endorsements regarding the usefulness of the information and their intention to put the information to use in the future.
- ⚙ Planned use of trainings was often for general knowledge development as would be expected from introductory and / or universal training resources.
- ⚙ Management Concepts trainings are being taken by Counselors more than Directors but work with Directors via direct Targeted TA and Intensive TA suggests they would benefit from the trainings as well.

### C. Targeted Technical Assistance Highlights:

- ⚙ Technical Assistance (TA) received by agency type continues to track the national composition of agency type (General, Blind, Combined). An indication of commonality of TA need across all agency types.
- ⚙ Once again, the pattern of high volume of TA to agencies/states in intensive status or soon to be intensive status demonstrated itself.
- ⚙ An evaluation of the CE CoP, QM's longest running CoP, demonstrated strong perceptions of ongoing value, with an interest in growing the group further.

### D. Intensive Technical Assistance Highlights:

- ⚙ At the end of year 2, over 50 % of all activities and outputs have been completed. This is an indication of the sustained activity levels of TA with SVRAs. There appears to be very little lag or delay in progress in key activities. This translates to VRTAC-QM being very active in all ITAA states and SVRAs devoting necessary resources to sustain ongoing activities, progressing toward completion.

TA from VRTAC-QM "makes challenging road a little smoother."

ITAA Interviewee

**SECTION ONE:**

**FORMATIVE  
EVALUATION**

# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. Focus of the Year Two Annual Report

Each year, a comprehensive Annual Evaluation Report is presented that covers in detail a description of the Center's processes (formative evaluation) and outcomes (summative evaluation). In the formative section of this report, we continue to summarize the progress of the Center in developing its structure and processes according to its proposed frameworks, proposed timeline, formally assessed needs in the field, and emergent needs and priorities. In the summative section of this report, we summarize the work of the Center according to its training and technical assistance activities with the levels of technical assistance broken out by type (universal, targeted, and intensive) and we examine the achievement of outcomes as they take place.

The volume of Center's work is enormous, and orienting questions are useful in parsing through the volume of information to understand impact from different perspectives:

- ⚙ What are the ways to structure an effective technical assistance center, and how has VRTAC-QM adapted evidence-based models to meet the needs of its targeted audience and stakeholders?
- ⚙ Is the Center on track with timelines and goals?
- ⚙ Are stakeholders with diverse and deep needs:
  - ⚙ learning of,
  - ⚙ availing, and
  - ⚙ benefitting from the resources of the Center?
- ⚙ What emergent needs have presented themselves since the planning for and inception of the Center and how has the Center responded?
- ⚙ What value has been brought to stakeholders and the field as a result of the Center's work and resources?

Training (at all levels) is evaluated in terms of trainee ratings of relevance, quality, and usefulness of the information. Universal Technical Assistance is evaluated through trends evident in website analytics, evaluations of website pages and resources voluntarily and proactively completed by visitors, and reach and engagement metrics for social media outlets such as the Center's Twitter and Facebook accounts, and podcasts. Targeted Technical Assistance reviews and evaluations involve descriptive analyses of information entered in the QM TA Tracker app custom-built for this Center. It includes descriptions of outcomes progress where relevant, including for TA entries that may be marked as Intensive TA. In considering progress on Intensive Technical Assistance, we have created a common framework for describing the work being done with each SVRA. For each, we first provide background on the agency, including its place in the administrative structure of a state, how the SWOT and other information identified key areas of need for TA, progress charts that provide an overview of how much of the work described in the ITAA is at various levels of completion, and metrics (where available) and qualitative highlights of outcomes being achieved and impact being made.

## **B. Evaluation Data Sources**

Evaluation sources of data that were collected and analyzed to inform the summaries and findings of this report include:

- The VRTAC-QM Quarterly and Annual Reports for Year Two
- Training Evaluations (from VRTAC-QM, agencies, and partners)
- The Online TA Trackers
- ITAA Workplans
- Social Media Metrics
- VRTAC-QM Website Google Analytics
- Interviews of ITAA State Agency Personnel
- Group Discussions of VRTAC-QM TA Team
- Data Dashboards for Program & Performance and ITAA States

## II. FORMATIVE EVALUATION

### A. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS GUIDING PROGRAMMATIC WORK

The primary programmatic work of the Center, Training and TA provision, is grounded in conceptual frameworks articulated in the proposal. The formative evaluation process will examine how the Center operationalizes these frameworks, utilizing them to guide the work they do. They are:

#### 1. IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE.

In this framework, TA and training providers act as the “support system” intermediary between systems that make knowledge and those that provide services using that knowledge (Katz & Wandersman, 2016). The VRTAC-QM will act as a “knowledge broker” that can effectively translate between producers and users of knowledge (Ward, Smith, House, & Hamer, 2012).

- ⚙ The TA Team strongly supports SVRAs as they respond to CAPs and correct processes, reports, and finances. Agencies undergoing RSA Monitoring reach out for assistance in preparing responses and have individual interactions, self-guided tools, and CoPs at their disposal. In addition, agencies often ask TA Team members to join their Monitoring sessions.
- ⚙ The Center has developed several tools, resources, and trainings to support SVRAs in being aware of, understanding, and implementing regulations and guidance from RSA including in developing or revising policies, procedures, and internal controls to meet requirements while being customized to the context of an agency.

#### 2. QUALITY ENHANCEMENT RESEARCH INITIATIVE (QUERI).

The QUERI framework approaches implementation by addressing (a) cultural norms, (b) capacity, and (c) supportive infrastructures to reinforce expectations for change and to sustain new behaviors (Van Achterberg, Schooven & Grol, 2008).

- ⚙ The initial work done with SVRAs to establish plans of Intensive TA, or even ongoing and deep Targeted TA, focuses on building a deep understanding of an agency’s needs and context, determining its capacity in terms of knowledge, resources, and staff, and agreeing upon a plan to meet its needs with mutual role expectations and accountability. For ITAAs in particular, this process can be seen in the conduct of SWOTs and gathering information about the agency during initial conversations.

#### 3. BRYSON’S MODEL OF ORGANIZATIONAL PLANNING/SYSTEMS CHANGE.

Bryson (2018) highlights the need for strategic planning prior to embarking on an organizational change effort. Feedback from stakeholders is identified as an essential component of the planning and implementation process throughout and is used for continuous improvement.

- ⚙ As noted above, understanding and meeting SVRAs where they are and planning effectively with mutual agreement and accountability is a fundamental process for the Center. A formalized, but flexibly implemented, SWOT process is a foundation to the



development of ITAAs: the cornerstone of the Center's efforts at affecting organizational change in SVRAs.

## **B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS GUIDING EVALUATION**

In addition to the conceptual, theoretical, and evidence-based frameworks reviewed above which guide the approach to VRTAC-QM's structuring and provision of TA services, the VRTAC-QM turns for guidance to other models when evaluating its impact.

### **1. APPLIED EVALUATION MODELS.**

With an emphasis on performance feedback and continuous quality improvement, the VRTAC-QM evaluation draws from several effective evaluation practices including Utilization Focused Evaluation, Stakeholder Based Evaluation, and Real World Evaluation (Bamberger, Rugh, & Mabry, 2006; Cousins & Earl, 1992; Patton, 2008; Rossi et al., 2004). These models emphasize stakeholder involvement in constructing evaluations with relevance to informing the program.

- Evaluation forms, metrics, and processes were developed with all Center staff to provide data needed by RSA, to support the TA Team in tracking progress towards goals, and to allow for outcomes to be set as goals with formal assessments but also to be flexible enough to allow for emergent outcomes or new goals when necessary. Evaluation Team members join all Center meetings to understand work being done by the Center, provide real-time support in developing evaluations when needed, and to share insights from data so processes and resources can be continually improved to meet needs.

### **2. IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE.**

Similar to the program, the evaluation also draws on implementation science approaches (Bauer, Damschroder, Hagedorn, Smith, & Kilbourne, 2015), such as the RE-AIM framework which assesses Reach, Effectiveness, Adoption, Implementation, and Maintenance (Glasgow, Harden, Gaglio, Ragin, Smith, et al., 2019). This approach recognizes that best practices are embedded within settings that can affect how they are operationalized and which may involve adaptations not only to the setting of adoption, but to the practice itself.

- The Center's trainings are evaluated in terms of relevance, quality, and usefulness which mirror the RE-AIM measures. More apt will be the evaluations of the Special Projects, which will look at how innovative and best practices are implemented within agencies and customized to their context as needed and how the agency itself transforms to benefit from the best practice/innovation.

### **3. KNOWLEDGE-TO-ACTION.**

Dissemination activities will be examined through the lens of the Knowledge-to-Action framework (Graham et al., 2006). This framework espouses: (1) identification of stakeholders' knowledge and information needs, (2) development of evidence-based tools and materials in clear, concise language and accessible formats, and (3) delivery of customized messages for specific audiences.

- The Center’s Universal TA and Training materials follow the key elements of the KtA framework. Resources were developed based on a foundation of needs assessments and discussions with stakeholders; materials and trainings are as brief as possible; and multiple channels and outreach strategies are used to ensure audiences can avail of them depending on their time available and role within an agency or partner entity.

### C. WORKPLAN PROGRESS

One of the key questions answered by formative evaluation is “are we implementing the workplan on time?” As a general rubric for the more detailed workplan, the logic model allows us to see the planned inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes for the Center at a high level. Figure 1 below represents the abbreviated logic model as it was co-developed by partners (representing stakeholders) at the time of the proposal. Here, we examine ongoing implementation of the logic model as the basis for the work of the Center as it stands, and note changes or significant progress in concert with relevance for evaluation, updating information presented in the mid-year report.

#### Abbreviated Logic Model for the VRTAC-QM

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SDSU</li> <li>• GWU</li> <li>• Cornell</li> <li>• Management Concepts</li> <li>• ICI</li> <li>• TCI</li> <li>• CSAVR</li> <li>• NDI</li> <li>• RSA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge Development</li> <li>• Needs Assessments</li> <li>• Comprehensive Review</li> <li>• SWOTs</li> <li>• Strategic Planning</li> <li>• Baseline KPIs Measured</li> <li>• Training/TA</li> <li>• ITA</li> <li>• Coordination</li> <li>• Dissemination</li> <li>• Evaluation/QA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benchmark QM</li> <li>• Annual QM State of States Reports</li> <li>• Changes in policies, procedures, internal controls, staff performance expectations &amp; staff evaluations, interagency and public/private partnerships</li> <li>• Briefs, Tools, Reports, Archived Trainings, Presentations, CoPs</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES (1-3 Years)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased SVRA adoption of QM strategies and practices</li> <li>• Increased employment rate from the prior year</li> <li>• Increased interagency &amp; public/private partnership activities conducted (e.g., joint meetings, trainings, clients)</li> <li>• Increased # and % of SVRA staff that report training and TA is of high quality, relevant and useful to their work</li> <li>• Accurate and Timely Performance and Fiscal Reporting Increase in the # and % of SVRAs that achieve their negotiated level of performance for MSGs</li> </ul> <p><b><u>LONG-TERM OUTCOMES (3+ years)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in the # and % of SVRAs that achieve their negotiated level of performance for all CPMs</li> <li>• Improvement in service delivery as defined by key performance indicators (KPIs)</li> <li>• Improvement in KPIs for QM program and fiscal management</li> </ul>

## **INPUTS**

Inputs remain the same now as at the mid-year. Specifically, there are two key changes at the input level for Year Two:

1. ICI: after having provided resources and training regarding culture and models of quality management, ICI no longer remains an active part of the Center's TA Team. Ongoing support for training on leadership issues has shifted to increase support for Interwork Institute's National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute and work on mid-level supervisory issues by CIT-VR.
2. VRTAC-QM has benefited from increased funding via supplementary funds from RSA and been able to directly increase services to SVRAs through the addition of two full-time TA Team members. Both these TA Team members were previously Directors of SVRAs with a long career in VR ensuring deep subject matter expertise and understanding of stakeholders' needs and priorities. Year Three will see the addition of further staff which will be covered in the Year Three Mid-Year Report.

## **ACTIVITIES & OUTPUTS**

Activities have all begun, some will remain ongoing for the life of the grant (e.g., TA, Training, Evaluation). Notable progress on three key activities and corresponding outputs have been made in Year Two, as first reported during the Mid-Year Report: (1) The Benchmark QM, (2) Management Concepts Trainings and (3) Communities of Practice. The VR Wellness Check was not implemented before the end of Year Two and relevant information pertaining to it is described here. Management Concepts trainings and Communities of Practice have been active in implementation and existing data and evaluations are presented in the Targeted TA section of this report.

### **(1) *SWOTs***

To examine the utility of the VRTAC-QM SWOT process, final SWOT documents for existing ITAAs were mapped to the VRTAC-QM topic area logic models (LM). Eleven SWOT reports had been completed for the 12 intensive states. A SWOT assessment was not completed for Delaware-Blind because it was a direct referral from RSA of an agency with emergency needs.

Upon review of the SWOT reports with respect to LM menu of items, a crosswalk was created of weaknesses, threats, areas explored further, and identified areas for TA and training. The next step mapped entries to LM categories. LM activities are grouped under the following categories: General Management: Policies & Procedures, Fiscal Management, VR Program & Regulations, WIOA Performance Accountability, Pre-ETS QM, Employment First (Community Partnerships), Employment First: Customized Employment, Employment First: Integrated Resource Teams, SARA, and Community Reinvestment Act. The most frequent categories were VR Program & Regulations, Fiscal Management, and WIOA Performance Accountability. The final step attempted to identify specific LM activities to the row. It was possible to assign activities to approximately 50% of the entries. When it was possible to identify activities, sometimes more than one activity could be assigned, or that same activity could be assigned to more than one entry. Findings of the analysis demonstrated that:

- For 3 agencies (Arkansas-Blind, Pennsylvania, South Carolina-General), the SWOT report show findings only about the 4 areas of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that were typically not organized further, but provided in a list.

- ⚙ In the other 8 states, the reports contained a section of ‘areas explored further’ such as fiscal, performance, and staffing. Upon review of the comments in the ‘areas explored further’, most of the comments could be reorganized to be termed a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat. In 4 reports (Florida-General, Hawaii, Kansas, and Montana), **the ‘areas explored further’ matched or exceeded the length of the collective SWOT sections.**
- ⚙ For Fiscal Management entries, the entries were often very specific such that it was not clear which activity was relevant.
- ⚙ Lastly, there were often items listed under weaknesses and threats that were beyond the scope of work VRTAC-QM could support or that the SVR agency could easily influence such as legislative activities.

In conclusion, the SWOT assessment and document appear to provide the necessary information for the ITAA development, the next step in the process, and start the linkage from the SVR agency initial request for support to starting the work. The reports are fairly standardized and comprehensive in their scope. There are features used infrequently, such as referrals to VRTAC-QE or NTACT-C, that could be helpful to include in all reports. Lastly, it may be useful to determine why some states generate such long lists of ‘areas explored further’ with minimal SWOT category lists to determine if the process or template should be adjusted.

## (2) *The Benchmark QM (→ VR Wellness Check)*

Originally intended to be completed by the second quarter of the first year, the Benchmark QM has undergone substantial work, revisioning, revision, and rebranding. It is now reframed as the “VR Wellness Check” and will remain a tool that SVRA leadership and staff are encouraged to use to determine their levels of compliance and/or best practices in managing their agencies and their agencies’ performance. Across several categories, agencies can determine if their practices align with or in between two standards anchored at the low end and high end of a 5-pt Likert-type scale. The high-end anchor is described as a “gold standard,” whereas the low end does not yet have a label or descriptor. User testing has not begun, but it is recommended that feedback solicits guidance on whether narrative descriptors of midpoints would improve comprehensibility, in addition to assessing comprehensibility of low- and high-end anchor wording. Reliability of assessments can also begin to be assessed by comparing multiple respondents’ assessments for one agency, as well as expert validation and objective measures of performance and/or documented policies and practices as possible.

VR Wellness Check is intended as a tool for use by SVRAs looking to conduct self-assessments and prioritize areas needing attention or improvement. As such, it can support SWOT assessments and monitoring findings in guiding TA and Training plans, activities, and agreements. It can also serve as a structured subjective score upon which one should see improvement over time when action is taken (self-initiated or via TA). Thus, while SVRAs are encouraged to use the tool as often as needed, and multiple individuals can take it from a given SVRA, guidance will be provided regarding “official” annual assessments and scoring to support SVRA and VRTAC-QM efforts to evaluate improvement over time.

## (3) *Management Concepts Trainings*

In partnership with Management Concepts, a national leader in the provision of training for Federal grant managers, the development of customized training courses was finalized in the second quarter of Year Two. The courses can be combined to result in a VR Grants Management Training Certificate

specific to the effective management of the complex VR grant. This four-course certificate program is targeted at VR agency Chief Financial Officers, and other Financial Managers, VR agency Directors, and other administrative staff who have duties related to managing the VR grant. The four courses are all offered by distance and are two days in length each. In this report, a process evaluation of the implementation of this training effort is provided as part of the “formative evaluation” for a first year of an activity (see below section evaluating Center Trainings). In the next year, patterns of registration and course completion will be examined and follow-up surveys or interviews conducted.

#### (4) Communities of Practice (CoPs)

Three CoPs have continued since Year One into Year Two and remain valuable to their participants as demonstrated through ongoing attendance and engagement. A fourth CoP began in this year: the Case File Review. Ongoing evaluations of the CE CoP is presented in the Targeted TA section of this report. Year 3 will see additional evaluations of the additional CoPs as they mature for evaluation.

(a) The Monitoring CoP participants have explicitly articulated their value for the CoP and the supportive community they benefit from as they navigate the Monitoring process together as a cohort. Future evaluation efforts will examine participation as a proportion of SVRAs slated to be monitored in a given year, themes of discussion across years and alignment of those themes with VRTAC-QM SWOT processes and TA menus of service, explicit strategies or resources used by participants that were obtained through engagement in the CoP, as well as whether participants also engage in further TA with the Center around topics that emerge from their monitoring and the discussions in the CoP.

Spontaneously provided feedback from one participant revealed the value from this CoP:

***“I do want you to know that I found your Monitoring CoP extremely valuable and helpful. Please keep facilitating this CoP! I found the facilitation by you and Carol very helpful. I think the whole CoP experience helped give me a sense of peace and calmness. Having a program who was reviewed in the previous cycle share their experience was also extremely valuable. Kudos to you all for facilitating these sessions.”***

(b) The Supported Employment CoP is a collaboration with CIT-VR and is again designed to be an opportunity to share strategies and resources and a regular forum for discussion of compliance and innovation. An examination of discussion content and future agenda topics demonstrates a strong focus on quality management of SE programs through ensuring meeting regulatory and accreditation requirements, ongoing quality assurance and evaluation tools, and addressing capacity and turnover issues to ensure capacity built is not capacity lost.

(c) The Customized Employment CoP is a collaboration with Cornell University with a focus once again upon management of a quality CE program of services. Ongoing engagement and participation by members, some who have attended since the time of the WINTAC, demonstrates the strong value of this community. An examination of discussion content demonstrates a similar focus as the SE CoP with respect to certifications, capacity, quality assurance and fidelity evaluation, and addressing capacity issues. In addition, practices and partnerships to support sustainability demonstrate a focus. A comprehensive, theory-based CoP

evaluation was conducted and a summary is presented in the Targeted TA Section of this report, with the full evaluation report for the CE CoP provided in Appendix B.

(d) The Case File Review CoP focus is two-fold: (1) share best practices and (2) create your own tool. The CoP began around the mid-year of Year 2 and will run until about the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of Year 3. The membership reflects a nice mix of “VR roles” and a baseline survey/needs assessment was conducted by the facilitators. A key finding was that there is a good mix of folks who are interested in different types of tools (e.g., targeted case reviews vs. comprehensive case reviews vs. reviews of quality and consistency and alignment with WIOA).

#### CoP Evaluation Schedule:

- ⚙ Supported Employment-Evaluation Scheduled-Year 3 Quarter 3
- ⚙ Monitoring-Evaluation Scheduled Year 3-Quarter 3
- ⚙ Case Review- Evaluation Scheduled Year 3-Quarter 3
- ⚙ Fiscal Forum (Management Concepts)-Evaluation scheduled Year 4-Quarter 1

## **OUTCOMES**

Language on measurable outcomes has been incorporated into all completed and drafted logic models. With the advancement of time for Year One ITAAs, progress on short-term outcomes explicitly identified are reviewed. Initial plans to track outcomes over time and compare to a baseline measurement included obtaining baseline data from two sources: (1) the Benchmark QM and (2) RSA Data Dashboards, which have replaced the use of data templates drafted in Year One.

The Benchmark QM’s evolution towards VR Wellness Check tool was described above. It remains an opportunity to globally assess existing practices of SVRAs and see their improvement over time as SVRAs conduct self-assessments annually. Due to the delay in its implementation, self-assessments as baselines for Year One or Year Two ITAAs as their practices stood do not exist. Using information from the SWOT analyses, Monitoring, and other information gathered to inform the ITAA, the Evaluation Team will discuss with the TA Team whether an “approximation” of the assessments, with particular attention to the areas identified in their ITAAs, can be made in Year Three. In addition, a cross-walk of the VR Wellness Check tool in general will be performed with both the SWOT tool and the logic models informing ITAA content to ensure alignment and divergence as intended.

Data templates were shared with Year One ITAAs, but not returned by the end of Year One. During Year Two it became apparent that templates pertaining to Program and Performance Management were a challenge for SVRAs (reinforcing their need for TA in this topic area). Over the course of Year Two, discussions with RSA presented an alternate opportunity. As possible, for ITAA States, RSA has offered to provide data dashboards so that performance monitoring from year to year on ITAA outcomes can be determined and tracked in a timely manner. This provides an excellent approach to objective outcomes measurement that can complement subjective assessments of improvement such as through the VR Wellness Check.

When categorizing and analyzing the type of work being conducted, through review of the logic models representing (evolving) “menus of service,” the derived ITAAs and workplans, and the measured direct and indirect outcomes and impacts it is clear that a significant portion of work is focused on

establishing or improving the basic infrastructure of managing an organization's processes and the work of the people implementing those processes. SVRAs are subject to complex federal regulations, as well as state administrative regulations and governance requirements that interact in complex (sometimes conflicting) ways. Contractual and collective bargaining structures can significantly limit an agency's capacity to be nimble and flexible in a rapidly changing environment by lengthening the process to a year or more before staff can be assigned new roles or duties or accountabilities, new hires can be made, contracts can be revised, or in some states: pens can be bought! The last example being somewhat tongue-in-cheek (but true: authority for purchases does not reside with the agency in question), but instructive in the ways an agency can be "hamstrung" in doing the work it needs to do. Indeed, as we review the completed and emerging impacts and outcomes further below, we see that the categories represented are indeed "fundamental" infrastructural-type issues that have been or are being resolved. The value of this in setting a foundation for directly relates to the contemporary fiscal crisis being seen in the past several years with agencies' capacities to serve individuals and spend down awards.

#### **D. Reflections and Recommendations**

In terms of workplan progress on critical operational and service aspects of the VRTAC-QM, the Center has achieved and surpassed expected milestones with the rapid establishment of a TA Team that conducted outreach and responded to incoming targeted TA requests (with the first recorded TA entry logging a request on October 2<sup>nd</sup>), establishing all four ITAAs and beginning work on the establishment of additional ITAAs for Year 2. An awareness of the magnitude of need led to increases in staffing and a plan for further such increases. One aspect of the workplan, the establishment of a Benchmark Tool, remains under review with plans in Year 3 for a rollout and rebranding.

Somewhat belied by the national needs assessment in Year 1 but evidenced by the incoming referrals and requests for high-volume targeted TA and more notably intensive TA, it is clear there is a high need for TA at all levels and that affirms the value of a management practices-focused TA Center.

With respect to intensive TA, the process for conducting SWOT analyses has worked well thus far, as an evolving framework that can adapt to a changing landscape of need and which maps on well to the Center's logic models or "menus of service.". In Year 3, additional crosswalks with the RSA Monitoring Tool and VR Wellness Check will be conducted as well. All three of these represent assessment tools that serve different purposes; crosswalks will determine their level of overlap with services provided by the Center, as well as whether the degree of overlap becomes redundant for agencies who may choose to use each for different purposes or timeframes as opposed to participating in each for the same purpose or within a short time of each other.

**SECTION TWO:**

**SUMMATIVE  
EVALUATION**

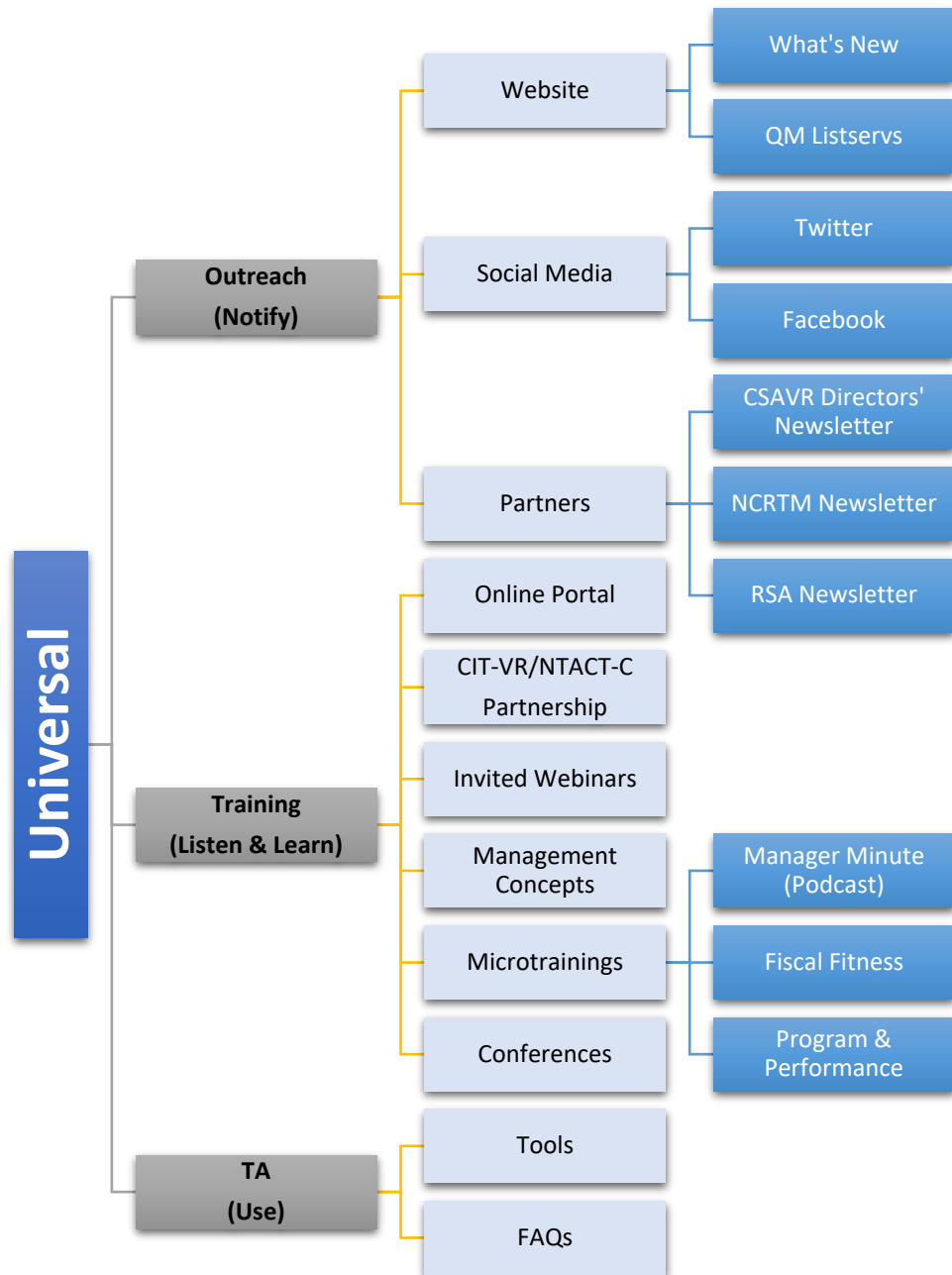


**Universal  
& Targeted**

**Training &  
Technical  
Assistance**

### III. UNIVERSAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

In the second quarter of Year Two, after the Year One Evaluation Report was completed, the Evaluation Team undertook a further analysis and mapping of the services being provided by the Center in the three levels of training and TA. The first mapping completed is for Universal training and TA and is presented via this flowchart infographic. In addition, evaluation findings and recommendations from the Year One Annual Evaluation Report for Universal ta and training were extracted into a PowerPoint presentation to review and discuss with the TA Team and Center Leadership for ongoing continuous quality improvement purposes (previously appended to the Mid-Year Report).



## A. Website

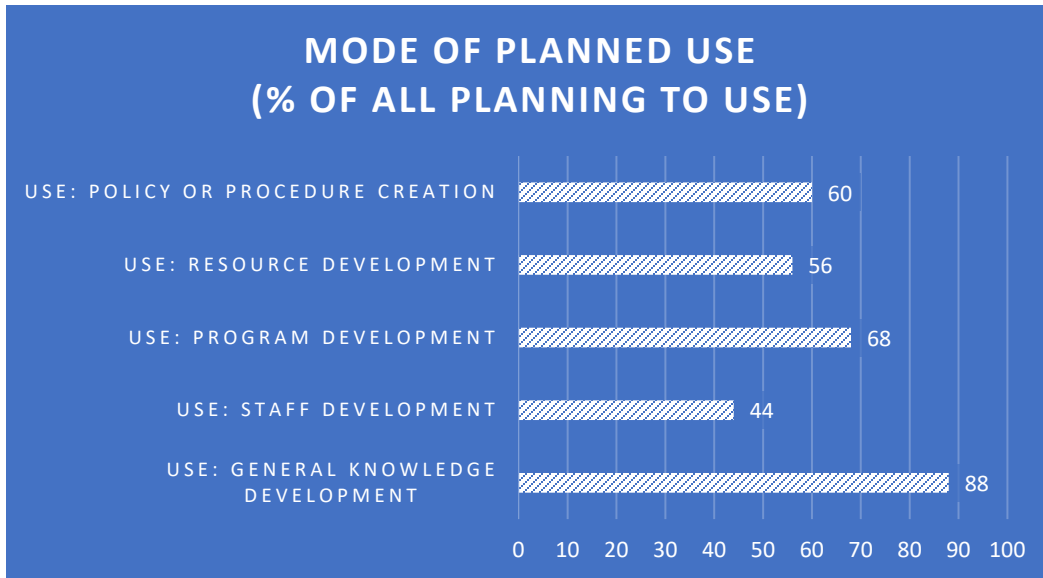
The VRTAC-QM website provides the foundation for knowledge dissemination activities and other forms of Universal TA (UTA) is primarily represented by the website. Online trainings available on the website are detailed further below with other trainings. With respect to website traffic, analytics demonstrated heavier traffic to the “Home” landing page, the page to access Concepts Management training, to access QM online trainings, and the main program area pages of Fiscal and Program and Performance. In Year One popular pages were Fiscal Management and Resources, “About Us” page, “Data Tools & Resources,” “Community of Practice,” and “WIOA Performance Accountability.” In terms of the geographic pattern of site visitors, it appears that the top 10 states are those not significantly represented in TTA or ITA work – which demonstrates the utility of multiple levels of TA in providing services to meet clients where they are and to provide the greatest reach. Distribution list sign-ups show fairly even rates for each of the 3 areas of the VRTAC-QM again at the end of Year 2, with approximately 1,500 registrants for each list (five-fold growth from the end of Year One!) suggesting value for all areas of quality management support equally.

In order to provide a specific on-demand opportunity to evaluate web-based universal TA resources, an “evaluate this page” button that links to a short survey went live in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of the Year One. In addition to capturing GPRA measures, it again explores planned use, and because of the anonymity of this feedback method, it captures the “type” of visitor. Year One resulted in no such evaluations, but in Year Two more have been proactively completed by website visitors.



In Year Two, there were 29 total evaluations: 79% of whom were from SVRAs, 55% of whom were “Supervisors, Managers, or Administrators” and 21% of whom were “Support Staff.” The vast majority of these evaluators identified the website resources they accessed as high quality and of high usefulness: 25 out of the 29 evaluators, or 86%.

As would be expected from Universal TA such as website resources, tools, and information, the vast majority (88%) of evaluators identified general knowledge development as one type of planned use, but several other categories were highly rated as well:



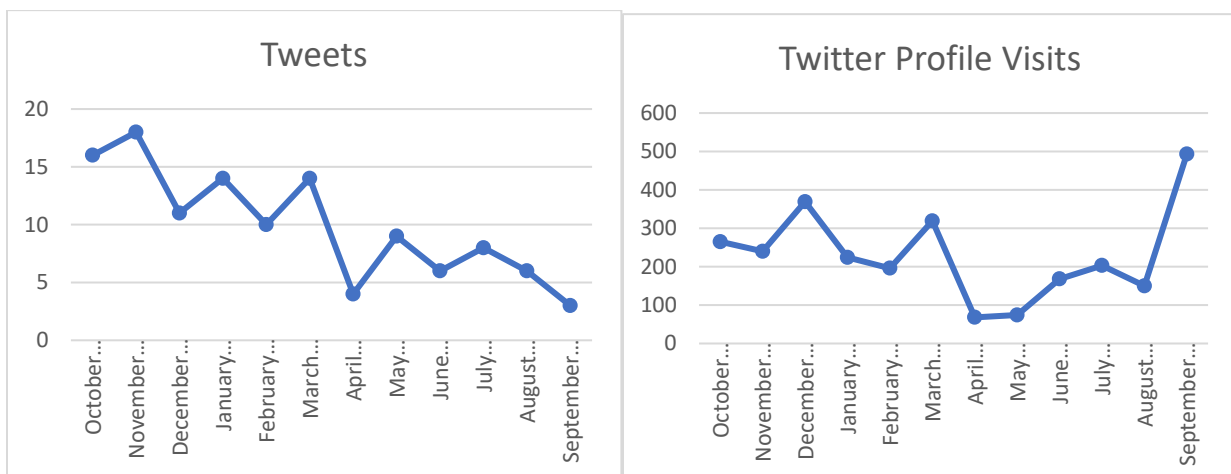
One open-ended comment indicated that the visitor was looking for information they knew should be on the site, but reported that they had difficulty locating it (they did ultimately locate it). Based on this feedback, the TA Team discussed and revised some website content. Another open-ended comment indicated: “TAC-QM is the best!!”

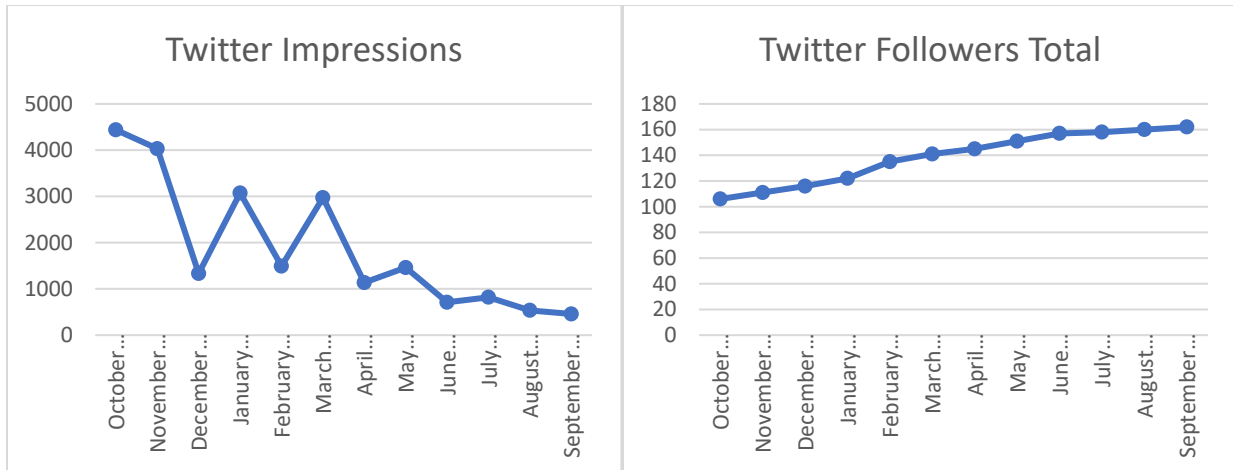
## B. Social Media

Social media outreach and dissemination was launched in Year One with Twitter and Facebook accounts and Podcasts. The accounts are used to enhance outreach and dissemination and draw followers’ attention to RSA, VRTAC-QM, and partner resources and events. Below, key engagement metrics are defined and presented graphically:

### Twitter Metrics

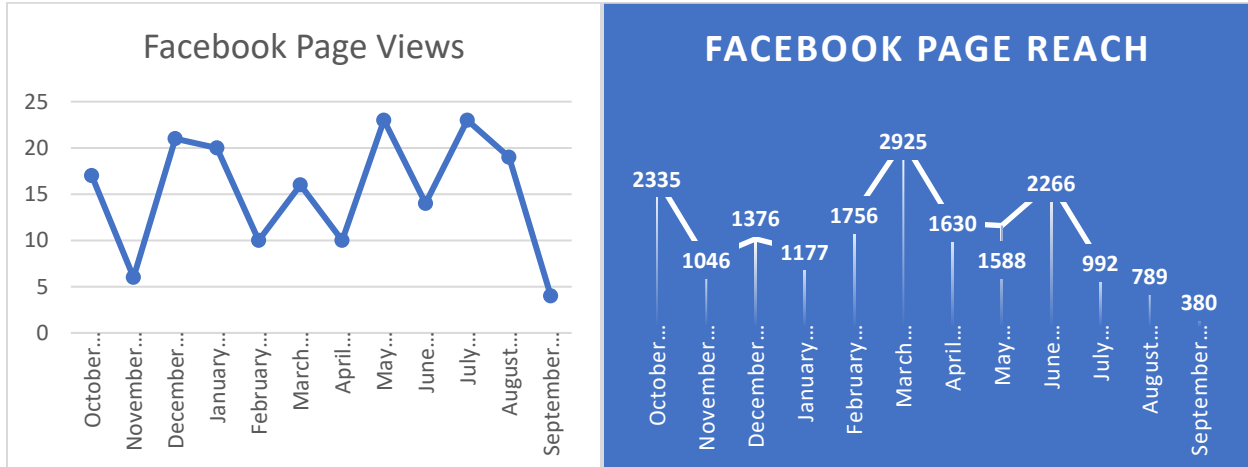
- ⚙ **Twitter Impressions:** Number of times users are served your Tweet in timeline, search results, or from your profile
- ⚙ **Twitter Profile Visits:** Number of times users visited your profile page

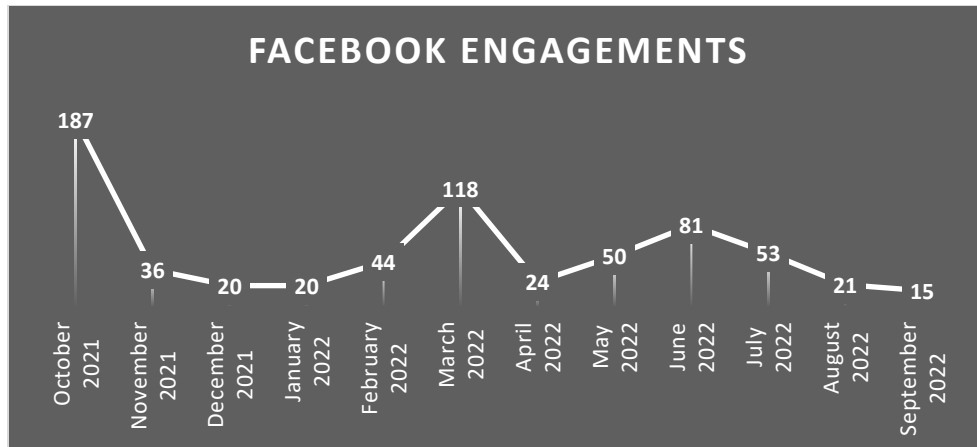




## Facebook Metrics

- ⚙️ **Post Reach:** the number of people who saw any content from your Page or about your Page. This metric is estimated.
- ⚙️ **Engagement:** any action someone takes on your Facebook Page or one of your posts. The most common examples are reactions (including likes), comments and shares, but it can also include saves, viewing a video or clicking on a link.

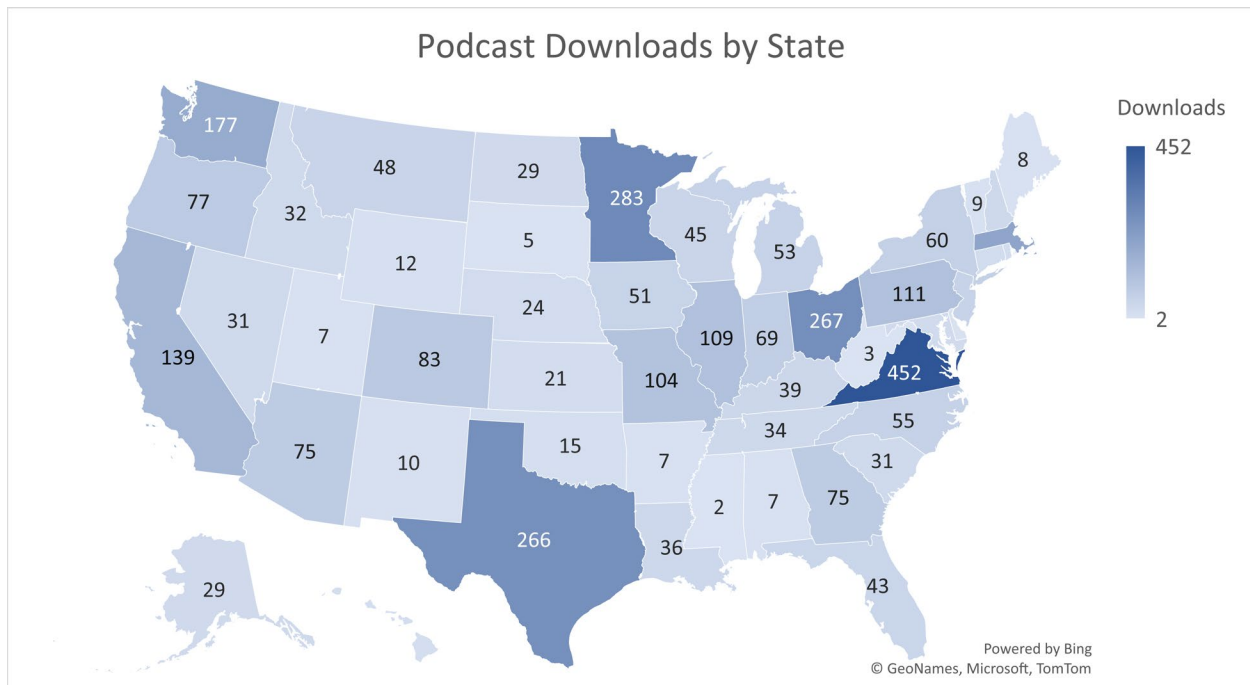
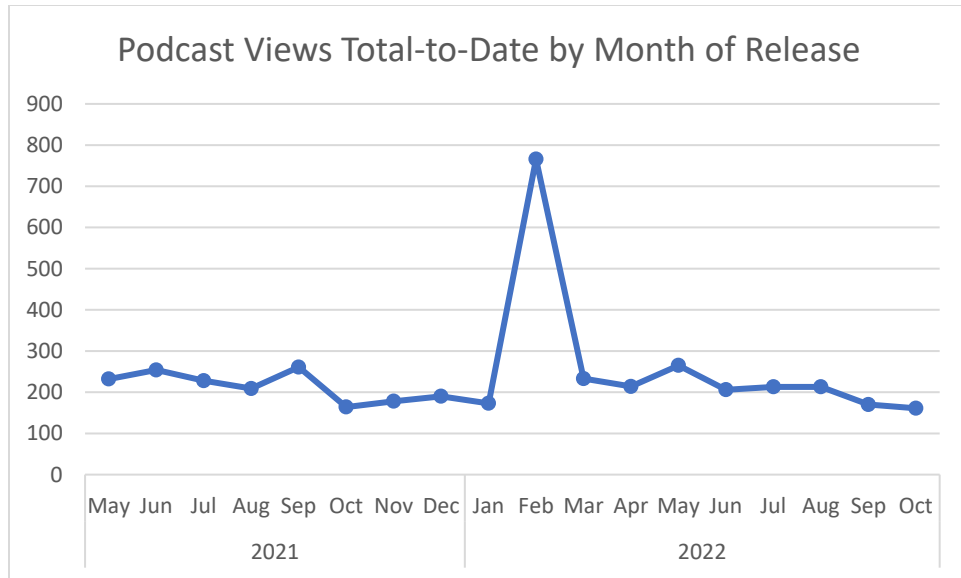




These metrics identify an increase in growth over time in reach and engagement with the audience. In addition to the website and Listservs, social media channels offer yet another way to disseminate announcements and highlight resources. Further below, under the “reflections and recommendations” section, additional opportunities presented by social media are offered.

In Spring of Year One, VRTAC-QM launched Podcasts of the “Manager Minute” which have been well-received and lauded by speakers, TA Team members, and SVRA listeners. In one case, an SVRA staff member shared with TA Team members that they listen to these podcasts when traveling as they value the content and upon hearing the Podcast on rapid engagement have now undertaken to implement rapid engagement strategies intentionally in their agency (MT-C).

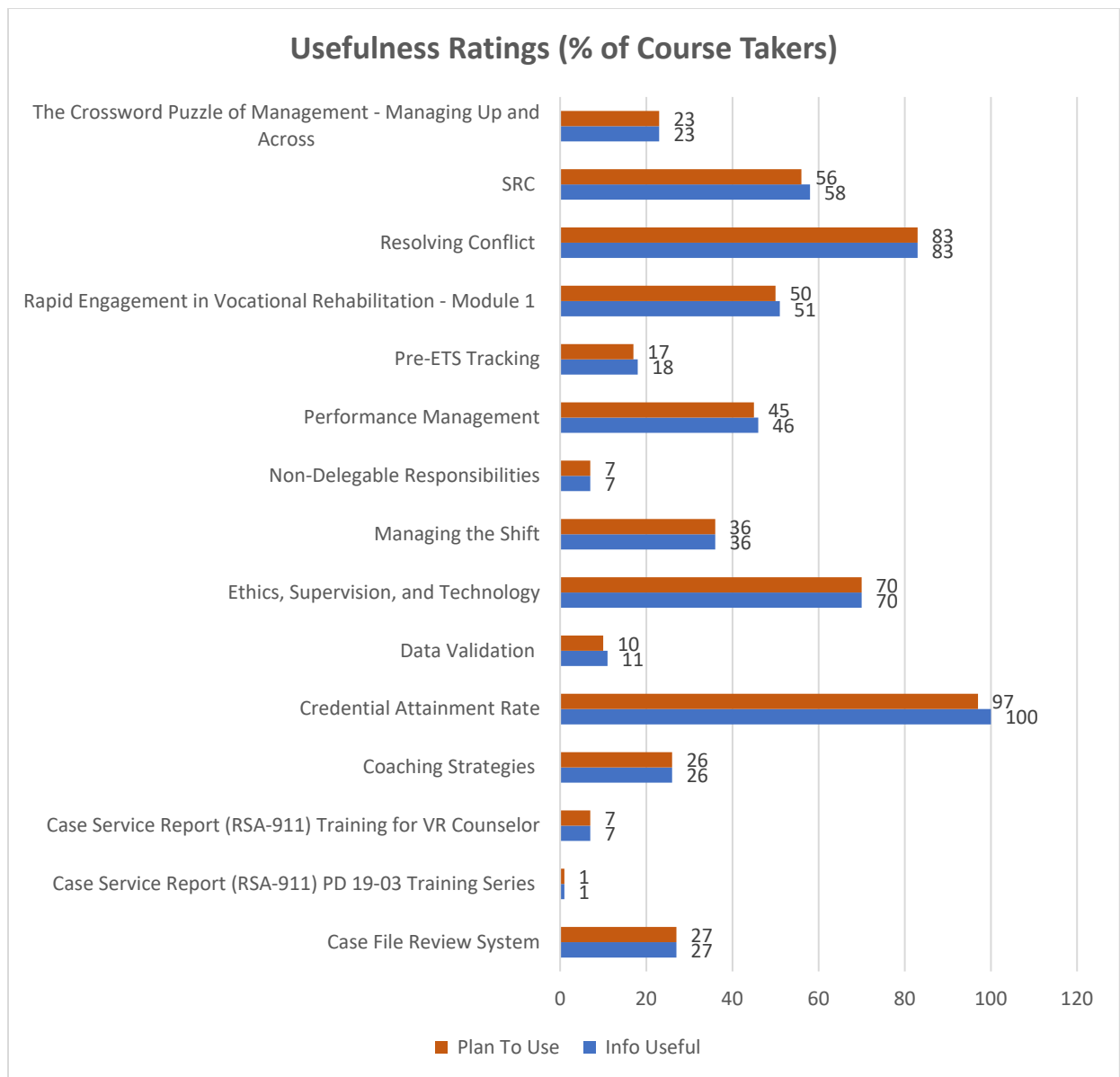
When examining metrics for podcasts, it is clear that the audience continues to grow over time; in May of 2021 the first episode garnered two downloads; these download rates at the time of episodes initially airing do not tell the entire story however, as download/listening rates continue to be tracked over time and demonstrate ongoing engagement. For example, podcast episodes since May of 2021 have continued to find audiences month upon month and now two-thirds of the 19 episodes have close to or over 200 downloads/listens and the other have 150 or more. Geographically, all 50 states and Washington D.C. have had listeners (see map below), demonstrating broad reach as would be the goal of a Universal TA resource. The returning and growing listener base demonstrates the audience finds value in the information presented.



### C. Universal & Targeted Trainings

#### 1. Asynchronous, Online Trainings in QM Website Portal

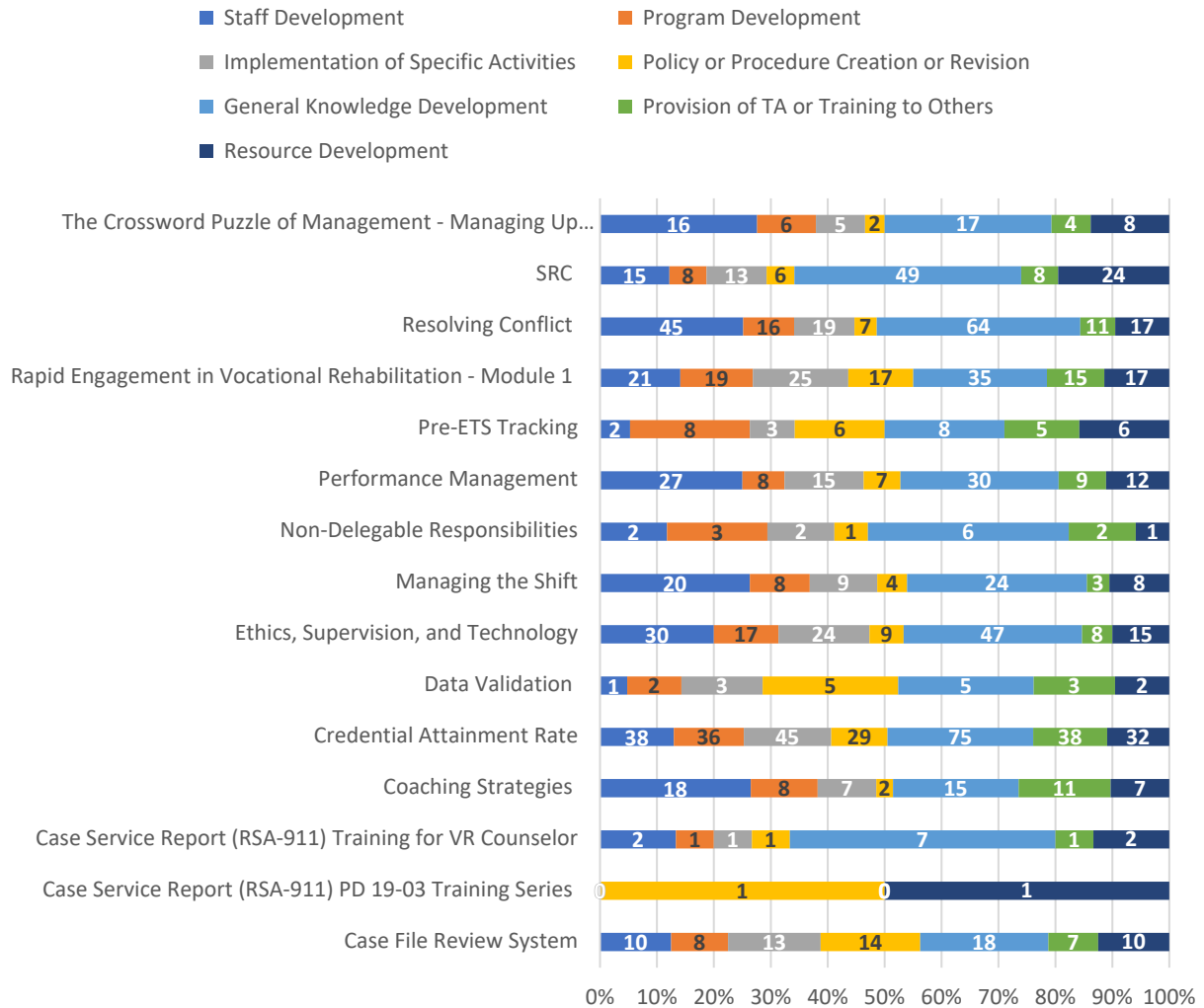
Fifteen courses have been added and developed in both Years One and Two of the Center for which evaluation data was available. Evaluation ratings, feedback, and contact information are obtained continuously, and the data is summarized and provided below comprehensively for all training participants – cumulatively. Across all courses, training participants provided strong endorsements regarding the usefulness of the information and their intention to put the information to use in the future:



In terms of the type of use, participants could endorse several possible categories; these data are presented in the following chart (once again, as would be expected for a Universal TA resource/training, the largest category of use is for general knowledge development):

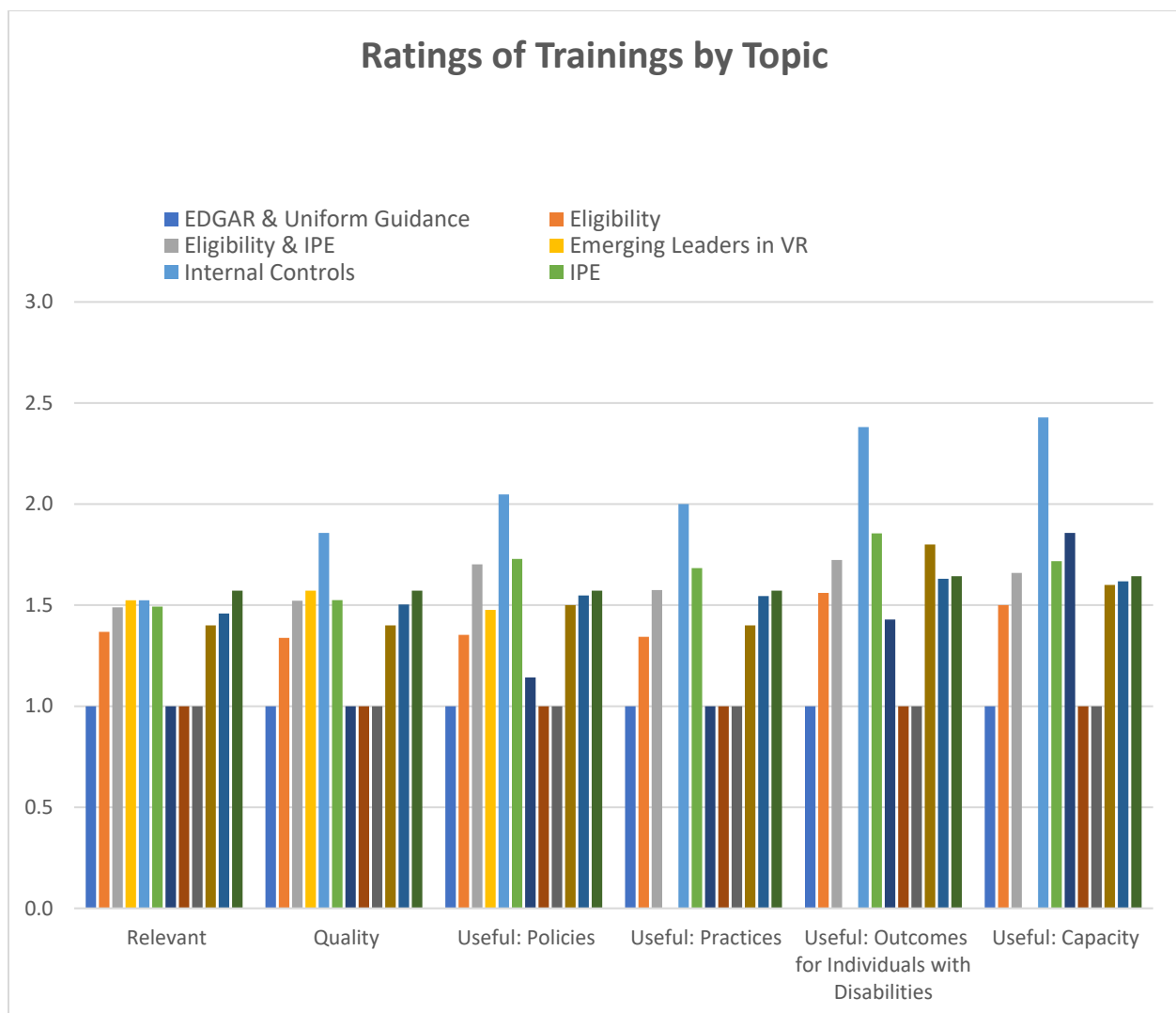


## # Planned Use According to Type of Use



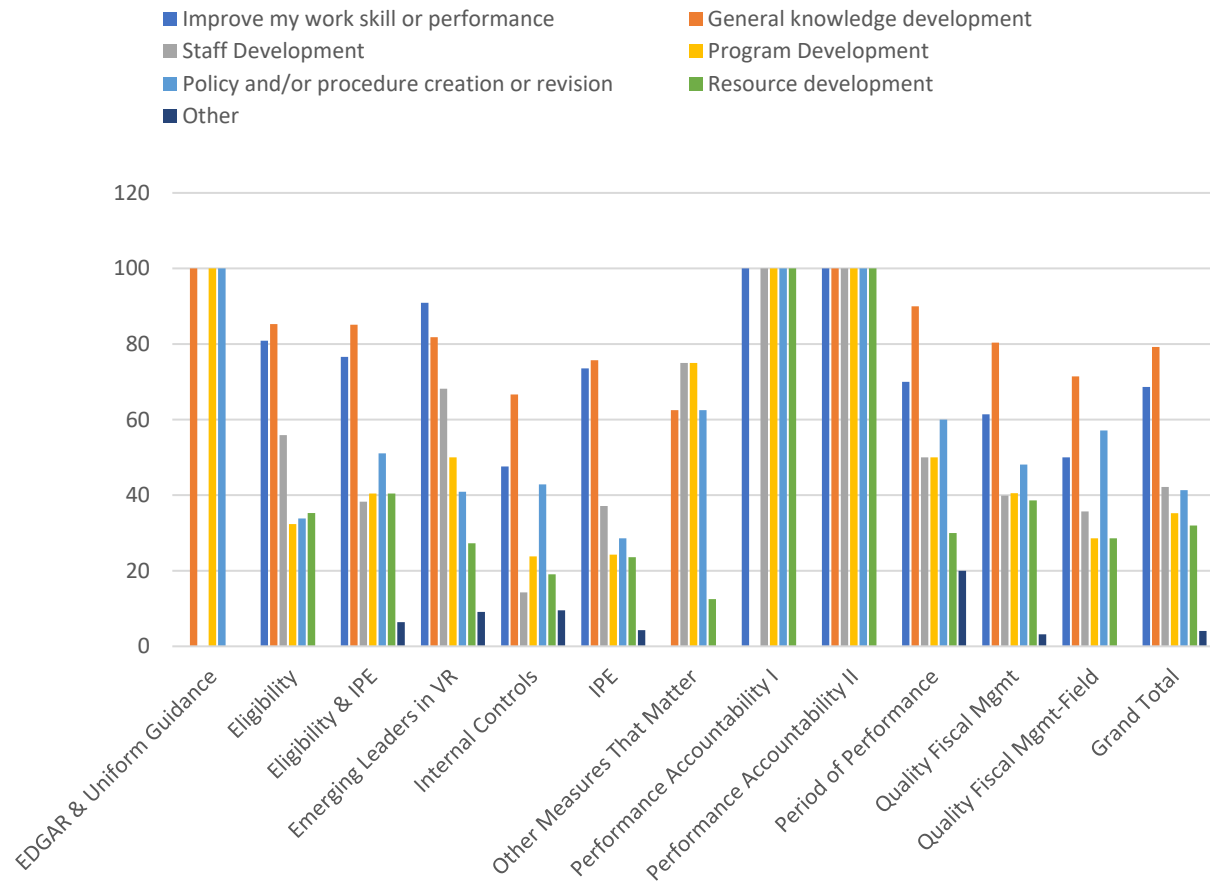
## 2. Synchronous, Targeted Online or Onsite Trainings

The TA Team provided trainings as part of Targeted TA on six topics directly to SVRAs either online or onsite, depending on preference and Covid-19 travel restrictions. Training evaluations were available for trainings on EDGAR & Uniform Guidance, Eligibility, IPEs, Emerging Leaders in VR, Internal Controls, Other Measures that Matter, Performance Accountability, Period of Performance, and Quality Fiscal Management. States participating in trainings and providing evaluations included AR-B, HI-C, ID-B, KS-C, KY-C, MD-C, MN-G, NJ-G, OR-B, RI-C, SC-G, and WY-C. Most of these states are (or were soon to be in Year 3) Intensive TA States; in all 491 evaluations were provided, 294 from Intensive TA States and 197 from Targeted TA States. Trainings were rated on a Likert-type scale, with 1 being a high rating and 4 being a low rating, on: relevance, quality, and usefulness:



\*1 reflects “high” relevance, quality, etc. and 5 reflects “poor” ratings

## % of Training Takers Endorsing Use Categories



Open-ended narrative feedback was also solicited in broad terms and in terms of what improvements could be made to trainings. Common themes included a preference for onsite, in-person trainings when possible, and appreciation for the use of examples to make the material accessible and relevant. As demonstrated by the ratings, trainings were well-received and comments elucidate that further:

"WITH THE KNOWLEDGE I GAINED THROUGHOUT THIS TRAINING, I WILL WORK WITH OTHERS TO SEE IF WE CAN CREATE TOOLS/RESOURCES TO CHIP AWAY THE AREAS WE ARE STRUGGLING

"THIS HAS TURNED MY THINKING IN HOW I WILL BE APPROACHING A MEANS TO AND END."

"I AM A CVRT, BUT STILL FOUND THE TRAINING HELPFUL AND SAW SOME IDEAS IN IT THAT I CAN APPLY TO REHABILITATION TEACHING AS WELL AS LIFE IN GENERAL. I REALLY GOT MORE OUT OF THE TRAINING THAN I BELIEVED I WOULD, AS IT WAS PRIMARILY VR DRIVEN."  
THANK YOU!

"SO MUCH KNOWLEDGE! WE NEEDED THIS."

"TO FINALLY BE IN COMPLIANCE WITH RSA AND FOLLOW PROCESS AND PROCEDURES CORRECTLY!"

"RACHEL IS AWESOME. HER PRESENTATION STYLE IS ENGAGING AND ENCOURAGES PARTICIPATION. IT'S ALWAYS GOOD TO HAVE STAFF HEAR THINGS FROM OUTSIDE ENTITIES. I AM HOPEFUL THIS ESTABLISHES THE FOUNDATION FOR STAFF BUY IN ON THE NEW OMTM."

"IT'S VERY ENGAGING AND THOUGHT PROVOKING. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK CHAZ COMPTON!"

"GREAT HOW WE WERE ABLE TO TAILOR THE DISCUSSION SPECIFICALLY TO OUR AGENCY AND PLAN TO MAKE CHANGES TO OPERATIONS."

"OH MY GOODNESS, I FEEL THAT SARAH C., CAROL P. AND ALLISON F. DID AN **AMAZING** JOB ON THEIR PRESENTATION. I WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO THINK OF ANYTHING TO CHANGE OR ADD. IT WAS REFRESHING THAT THEY KNEW OUR SYSTEM AND ITS LANGUAGE. THAT MADE THIS PRESENTATION ONE OF THE **BEST** I HAVE EVER SEEN."

## D. Concepts Management Trainings

A process evaluation discussion was held with QM Leads managing the Concepts Management effort to determine the effectiveness of implementation at this early stage and identify any ways that it may be improved as well as any insights or possible priorities when conducting the evaluation with course participants.

### Development & Management Issues:

- ⚙ Administrative management of course selection and registration is a significant undertaking. Need further support of that effort with customer service/customer facing experience. Concepts Management charges a fee to do this for others and could do it for QM.
- ⚙ Slowed down in development of course content and ultimately reduced customizations because of lengthy review process involved. Now, much custom information is not in formal course content, but instructor notes for utilization during course delivery.
- ⚙ Hiccups with beginning of course implementation and instructor knowledge occurred, but the situation is much improved and current instructors are strong and collaborate well with QM team to identify answers to questions that arise. (Initially an instructor that did not see value in customization or correcting content delivered has been let go.) Thus, Concepts Management capacity is being built in VR grants management content. Separately, CM's capacity has also been built around disability accommodation issues. Accommodations were not being provided and information about the ADA was passed along – now such accommodations are understood and available (interpreter).
- ⚙ Lessons from early days: build in more time for course development, time with instructors to train them on content and customized issues for VR.

### Course-Takers: Support/Experience

- ⚙ Courses provide knowledge, but ongoing support and engagement with students is needed. Current approach to have a “Fiscal Forum” the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of each month (begun in June 2022) is working very well. There were 9 persons the first time and now there are over 40. Participants appreciate having an ongoing venue to ask follow-up questions as they apply their learning. *\*\* Will be doing an evaluation with them in Spring 2023 for Year 3 Mid-Year Report when it will have been a year of Forums.*
- ⚙ Foundational knowledge is important. Course-takers are in 2 camps. (1) Some course-takers are completely new and have limited knowledge about fiscal management or grants management coming into the course. They still have basic questions. There is a basic/introductory course offered by CM that could have been incorporated into our series – worth considering identifying it for our students as a pre-requisite to our series for novices? (2) Second camp of folks are knowledgeable and ask can relate financial management to program management. We've had nuanced questions come up. One example is a state looking at transferring funds to Independent Living Services (permitted) so they could provide needed supports and services.
- ⚙ Some course-takers have noted they wished they had taken the course prior to RSA monitoring – that the knowledge they gained in the course gave them a deeper understanding of issues that arose in monitoring and context they needed to understand RSA-identified issues.
- ⚙ Population of course-takers could use expansion. From a SVRA-wide perspective, we have had a tremendous first year and approximately over 52 of 78 SVRAs have participated. But, only 11 or 12 Directors have taken it, and they're important to fiscal management and its impact on program

management. Also, those SVRAs that are missing from the list are those we know to be in need of fiscal management training.

#### Future Considerations

- ⚙ Support for course management itself – particularly registration. (see above)
- ⚙ Assignment of a prerequisite (a basic course CM offers) could be a good idea. Or covering basics ourselves in some way. (see above)
- ⚙ There is significant turnover in fiscal staff across the country impacting all SVRAs. Capacity being built today can become capacity lost tomorrow.

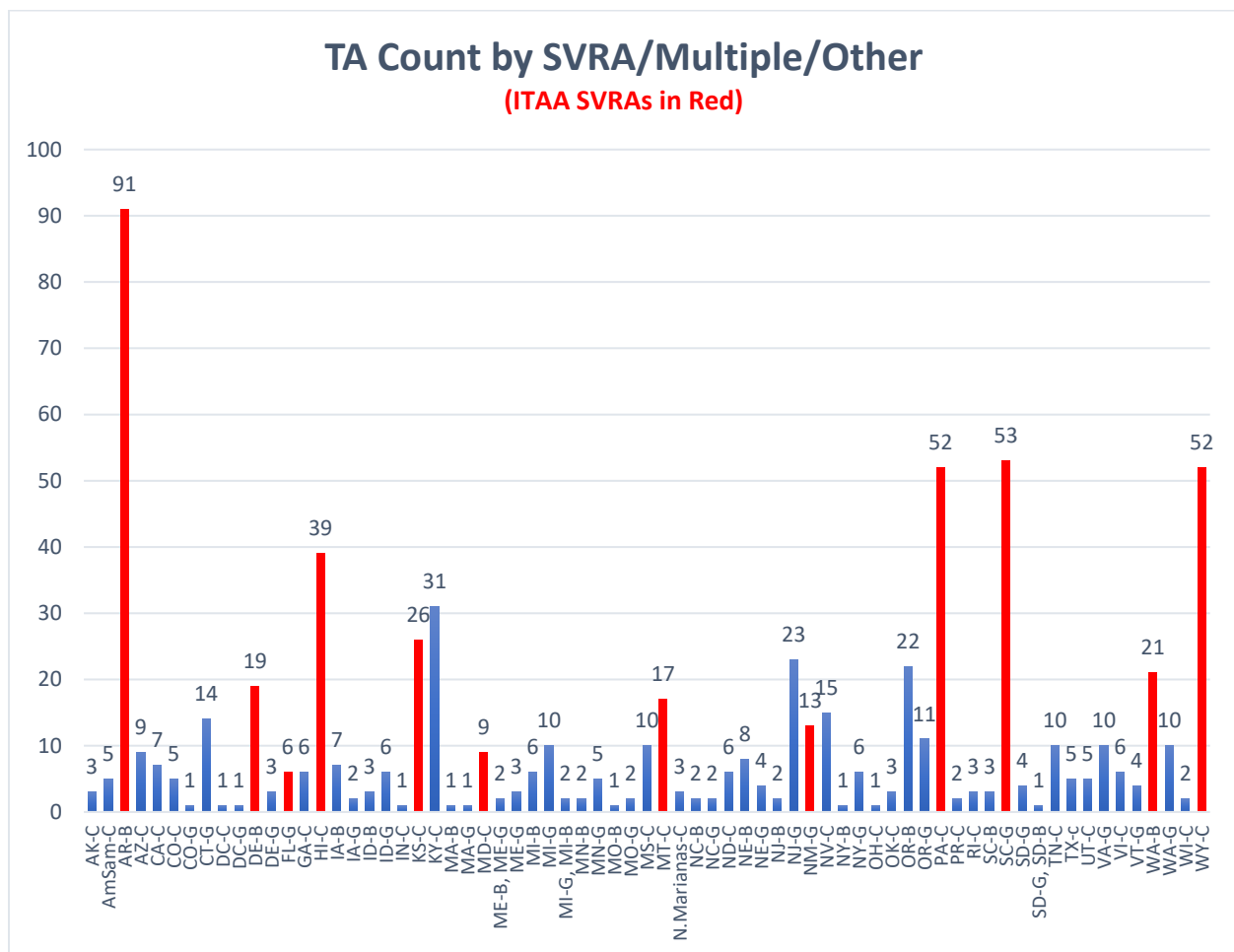
#### **E. Reflections and Recommendations**

Outreach and engagement via the website and social media are working well to reach targeted audiences. The engagement occurs through a one-way channel, but there are possibilities for generating dialogues that could pull in feedback and fuel further discussion with the audience to consider. Trainings continue to garner high ratings of relevance, quality, and usefulness. The largest endorsed category of use is to support general knowledge development. Management Concepts trainings are being taken by Counselors more than Directors but work with Directors via direct Targeted TA and Intensive TA suggests they would benefit from the trainings as well.

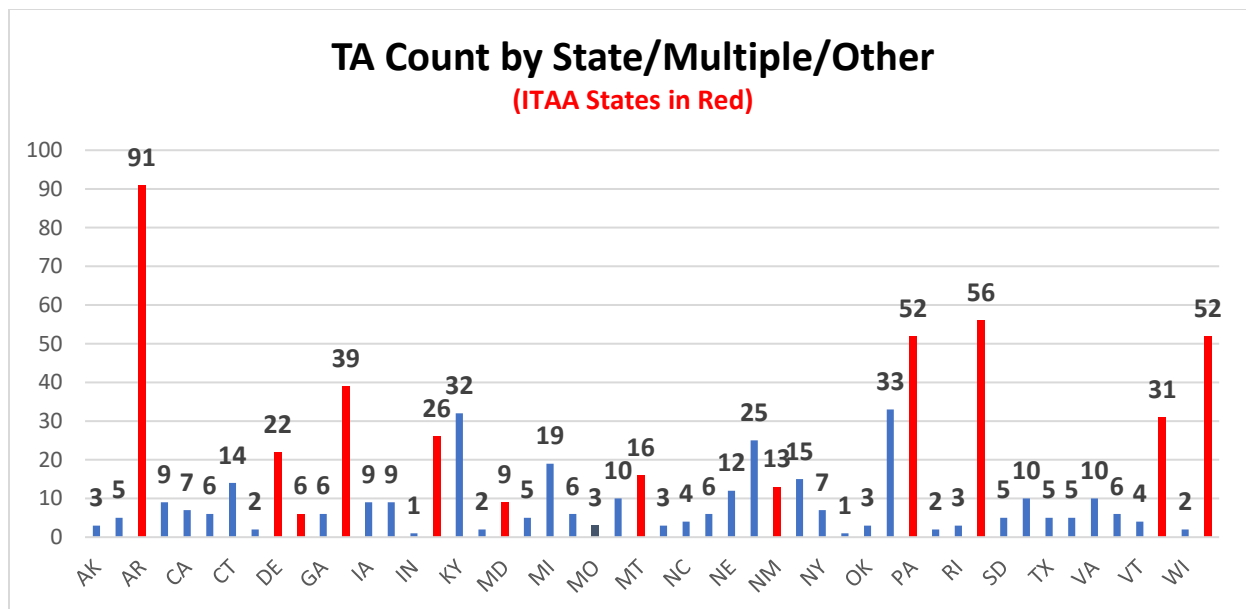
## IV. TARGETED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE<sup>1</sup>

### A. TA Volume

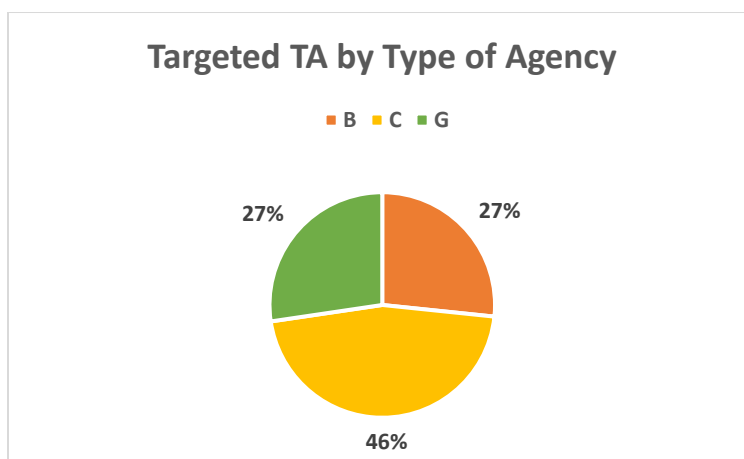
The first two charts represent the number of TA entries, or the volume of TA work, by (1) SVRA and (2) state overall. The numbers for ITAA states are represented in red. As can be seen, a high volume of Targeted TA (TTA) was provided to our ITA states, but several other states also requested comparably high volumes of TTA (given the lag in reporting, what we saw as a pattern in Year 1 holds true for Year as well; specifically, high-volume states were either Intensive TA or soon to become Intensive TA states).



<sup>1</sup> The data in this section represent targeted TA activities logged in the TA Trackers. A legacy TA Tracking system was utilized in the first quarter to record entries as development of the customized VRTAC-QM TA Tracker continued. By the second quarter, the new QM TA Tracker was live. Analyses combine data from both trackers where common fields were available or could be coded to align.

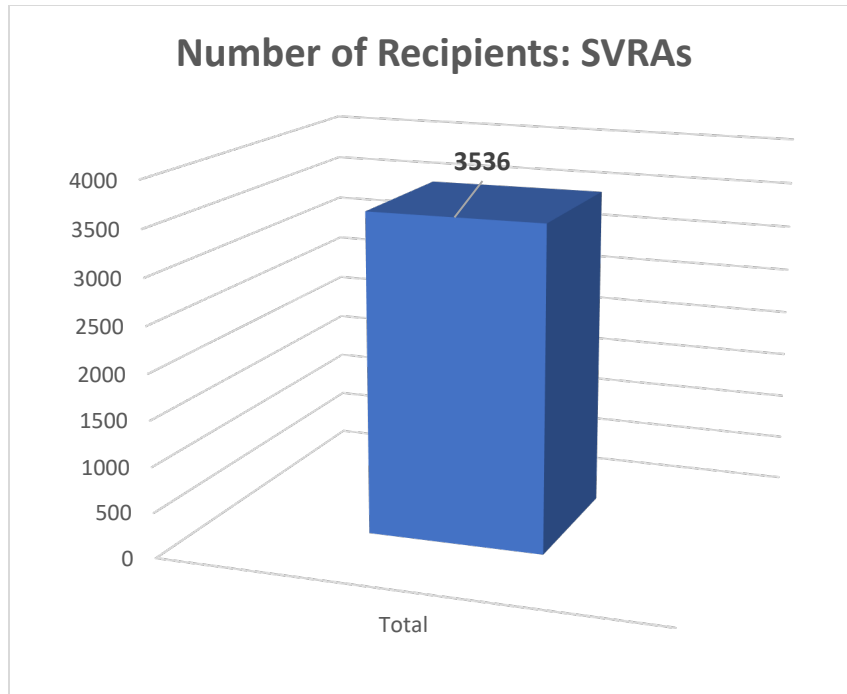


In terms of volume by the “type” of SVRA, the split between “Combined,” “General,” and “Blind” agencies is fairly representative of the proportion of such agencies across the country. Given that all agencies are working with the same financial and performance regulatory frameworks at the Federal level, we would expect to see the relevance of VRTAC-QM TA support having this equitable reach.



Switching from a global view to the individual, the reach of TA in terms of individuals directly receiving TA is significant: 3, 536 recipients of Targeted TA. Further below, we see that this Targeted TA is taking a significant portion of time to provide as well and this is excluding efforts for Universal and Intensive TA.

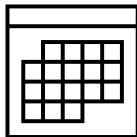




***1, 820 hours***

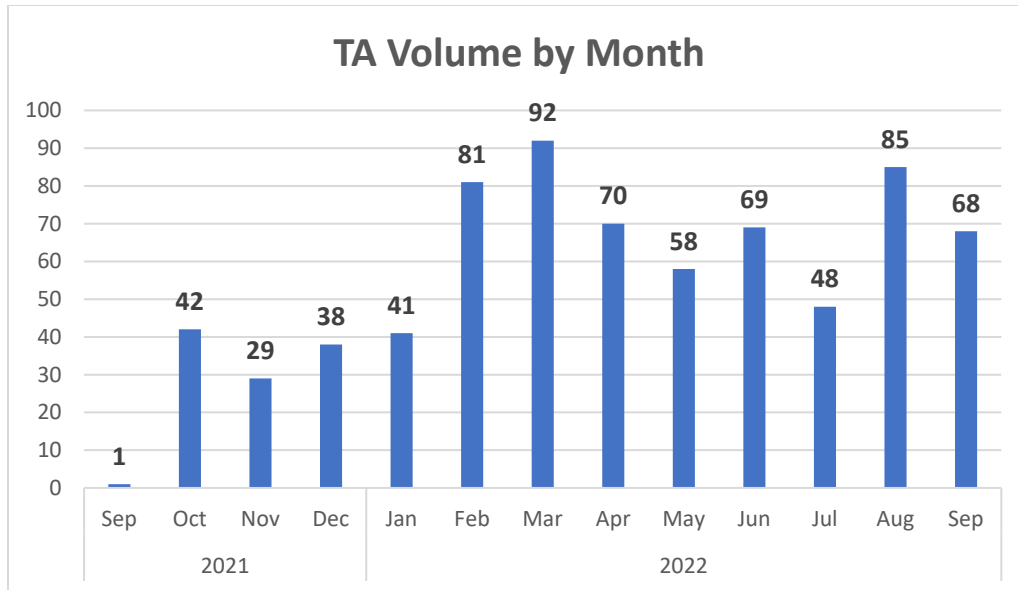


***227.5 Workweek Days***



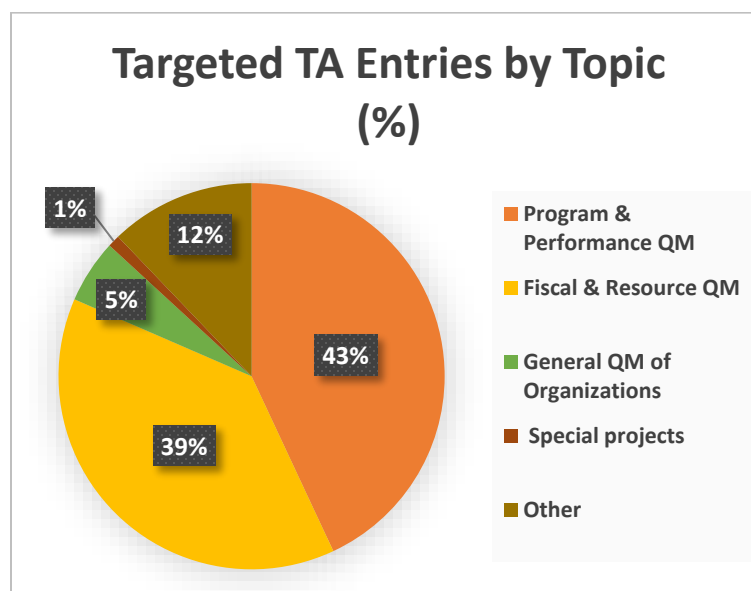
***45.5 Workweeks***

The final graphic examines volume over time (monthly trends) where we see a noticeable bump in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter. During this period of time, two distinct things happened from the VRTAC-QM perspective: (1) two new TA staff joined the Center and were able to jump in to provide TA to states and (2) the QM TA Tracker went live and is intentionally more efficient to use, perhaps increasing engagement with it.



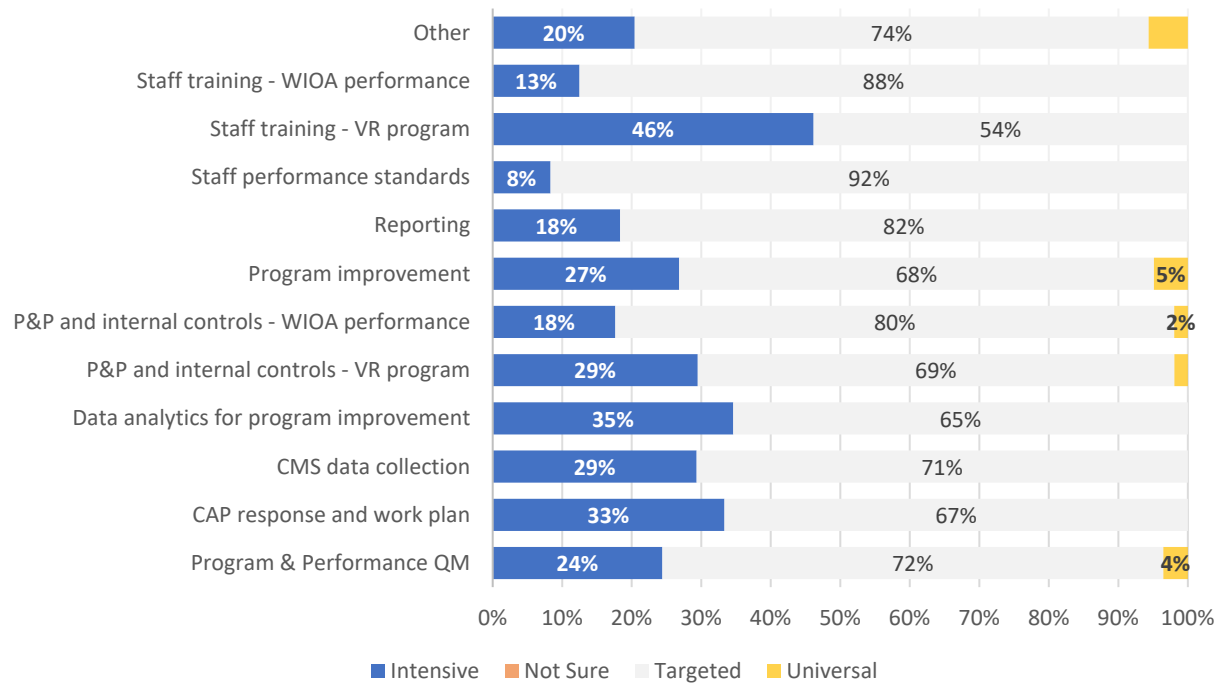
## B. Nature of Targeted TA

In terms of the nature of TA, entries in the new QM TA Tracker are recorded by topic. (Entries for the first quarter of the year were coded to reflect the main topic areas being used in the new tracker to permit comprehensive, merged analysis). The vast majority of work is covered by the topic areas of Program & Performance and Fiscal & Resource. Special Projects and General QM of Organizations follows. Special Projects have yet to launch and General QM of Organizations has only recently begun to be an Intensive TA topic allowing for a greater menu of services under that topic area. The category of “other” represents activities that often cross multiple areas or respond to broad areas of overall SVRA functioning.

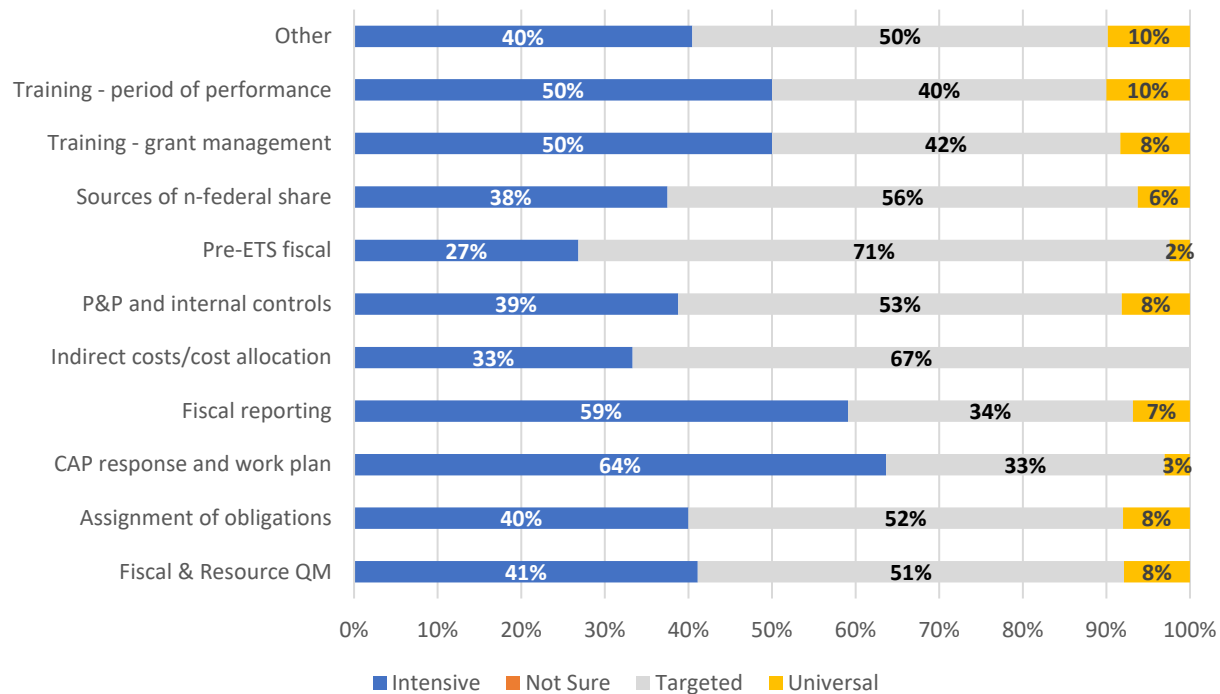


New to the customized QM Tracker is the ability to see sub-categories of topics; for Program and Performance we see fairly low endorsement of the “Universal” TA type, though with fiscal we see more.

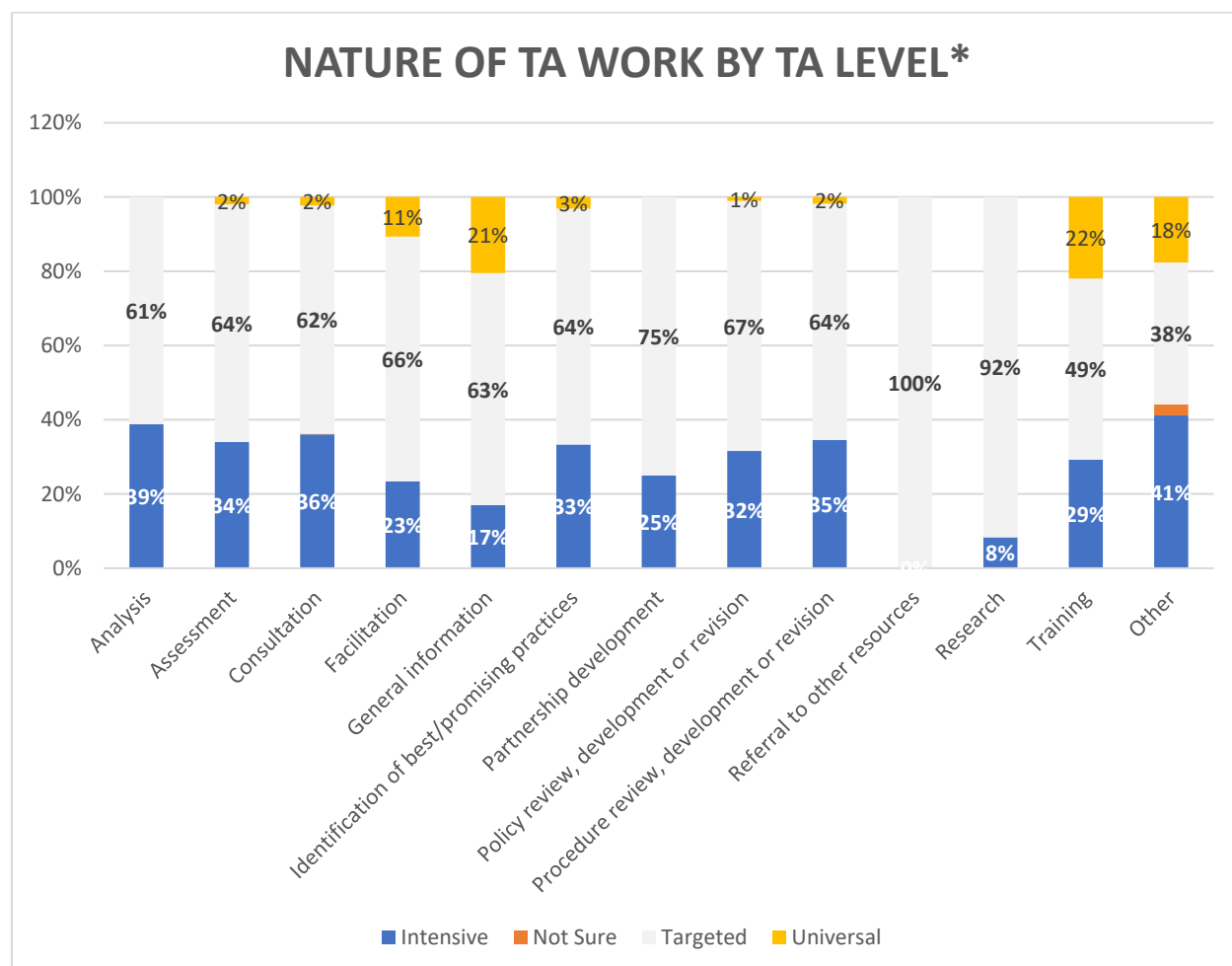
## % OF PROGRAM & PERFORMANCE TA TYPES BY TA LEVEL\*



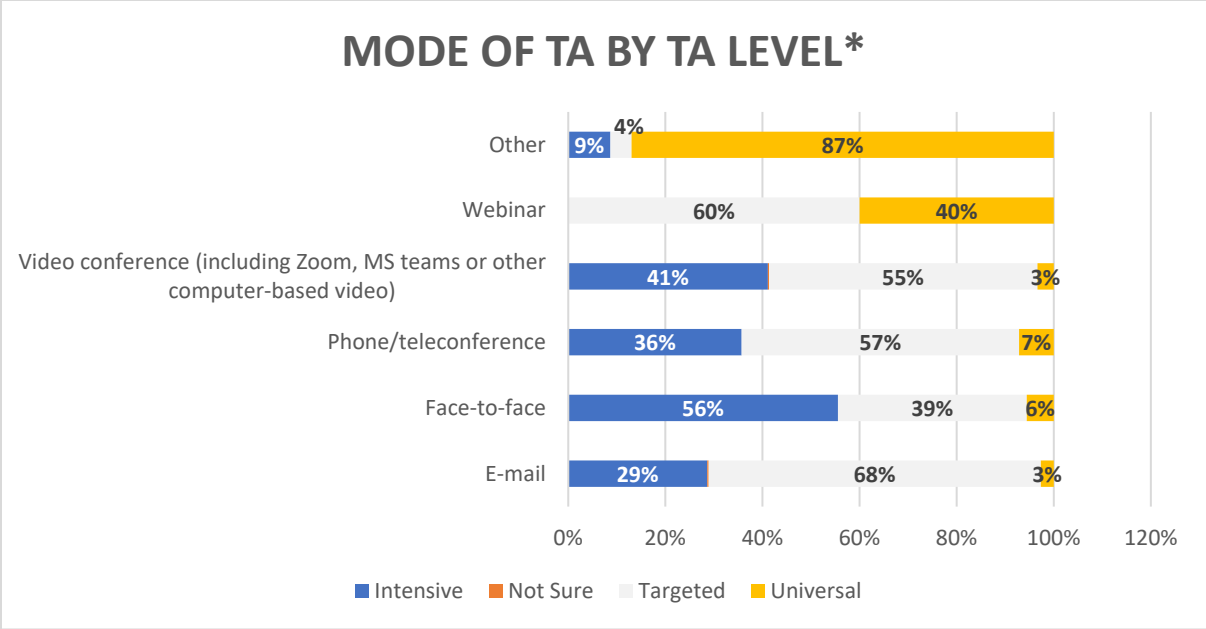
## % OF FISCAL & RESOURCE TA TYPES BY TA LEVEL\*



The nature of TA work by level shows that sharing general information garners some of the highest endorsements for Universal TA, but a fairly high level of endorsement for Targeted TA as well. It may be worth considering whether there are more resources (trainings, factsheets, FAQs, tools, etc.) that could be developed around “general information” so that stakeholders can access the information through asynchronous channels rather than direct engagement.

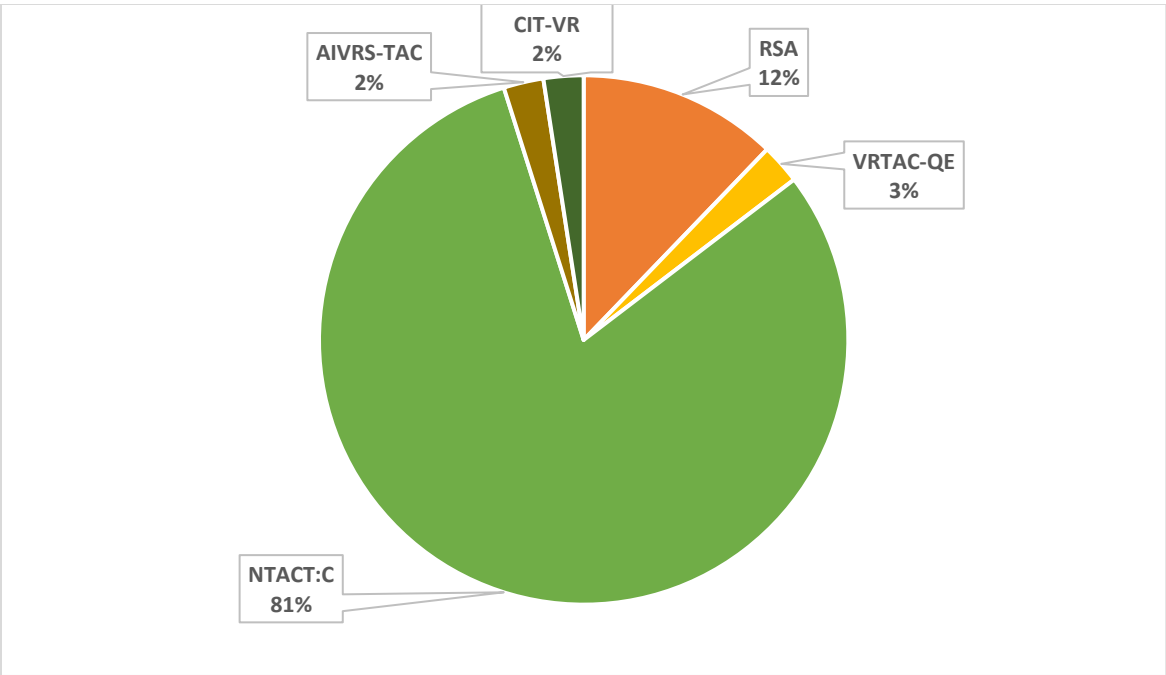


The QM Tracker began undergoing revision within the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of Year 2 with respect to Universal TA and is anticipated to have those changes go live in Year 3. The chart below shows that much Universal TA (e.g., social media) is being addressed through the “other” category; changes will allow for detail to be accurately and more specifically captured within the Tracker itself.



\*The preceding charts with asterisks represent information captured by the customized QM tracker and thus are only available for Quarters 2-4. These fields were not available in the legacy WINTAC TA Tracker which was in use during the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of Year 2.

Finally, in terms of the “nature” of TA work, the Center also tracks its intentionally collaborative activities in the TA Tracker (these are in addition to the collaborative work taking place under ITAAs). The collaborative work is broad in scope, covering RSA as well as all the other large TA Centers serving SVRAs. The nature of VRTAC-QM’s work has RSA deeply engaged with as a partner, making the collaborative engagement with them necessary, significantly valuable, and unique.



### C. Communities of Practice: Customized Employment (CE) (CoP) Evaluation Summary

The CoP is made up of 57 members from 17 states, all of whom are implementing CE. All 57 members were invited to participate in the initial survey. Only survey respondents, 12 individuals from 11 separate states, were invited to participate in one of two focus groups – newcomers <2 years and old-timers ≥ 2 years. There was no need to exclude any members from participating; however, participation was not required. The site selected for this study was the Customized Employment CoP under the VR TAC–QM. Since there has been no formal mechanism in place to evaluate the CoP and its potential value for states in the implementation

When asked questions regarding the value of the CoP, participants generally made positive statements about how the CoP has helped them. In the surveys, 22/24 of the statements made were positive statements and 2/24 were more neutral statements (e.g., “participate as time allows”). In the focus groups, many participants provided specific statements of what they valued, many of which are noted above. In addition to what has already been reported, one participant noted that the VR TAC – QM leaders “were pretty critical in getting our training approved by ACRE [Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators].”

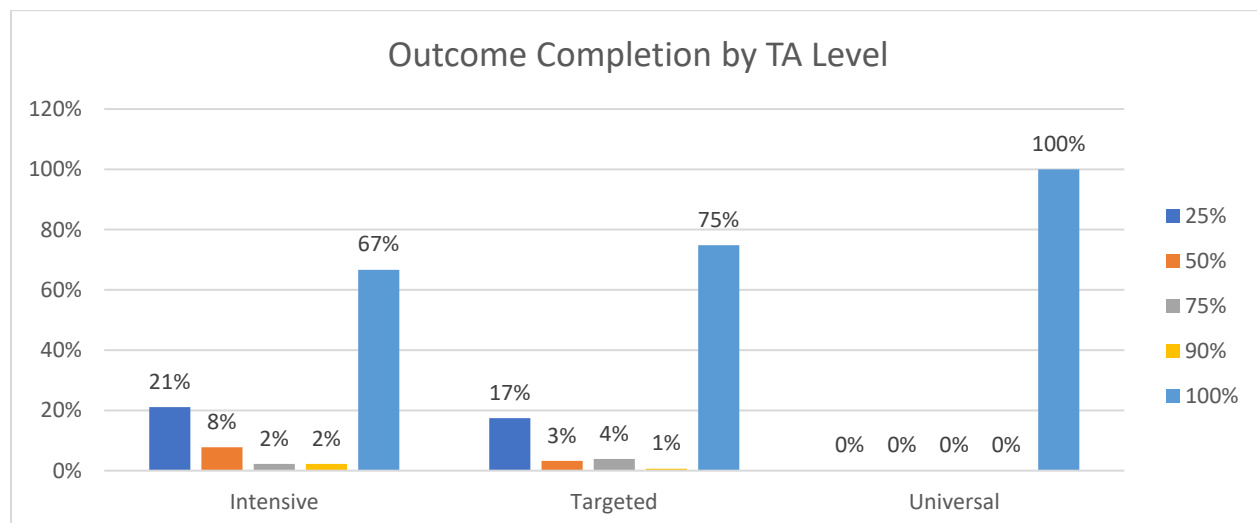
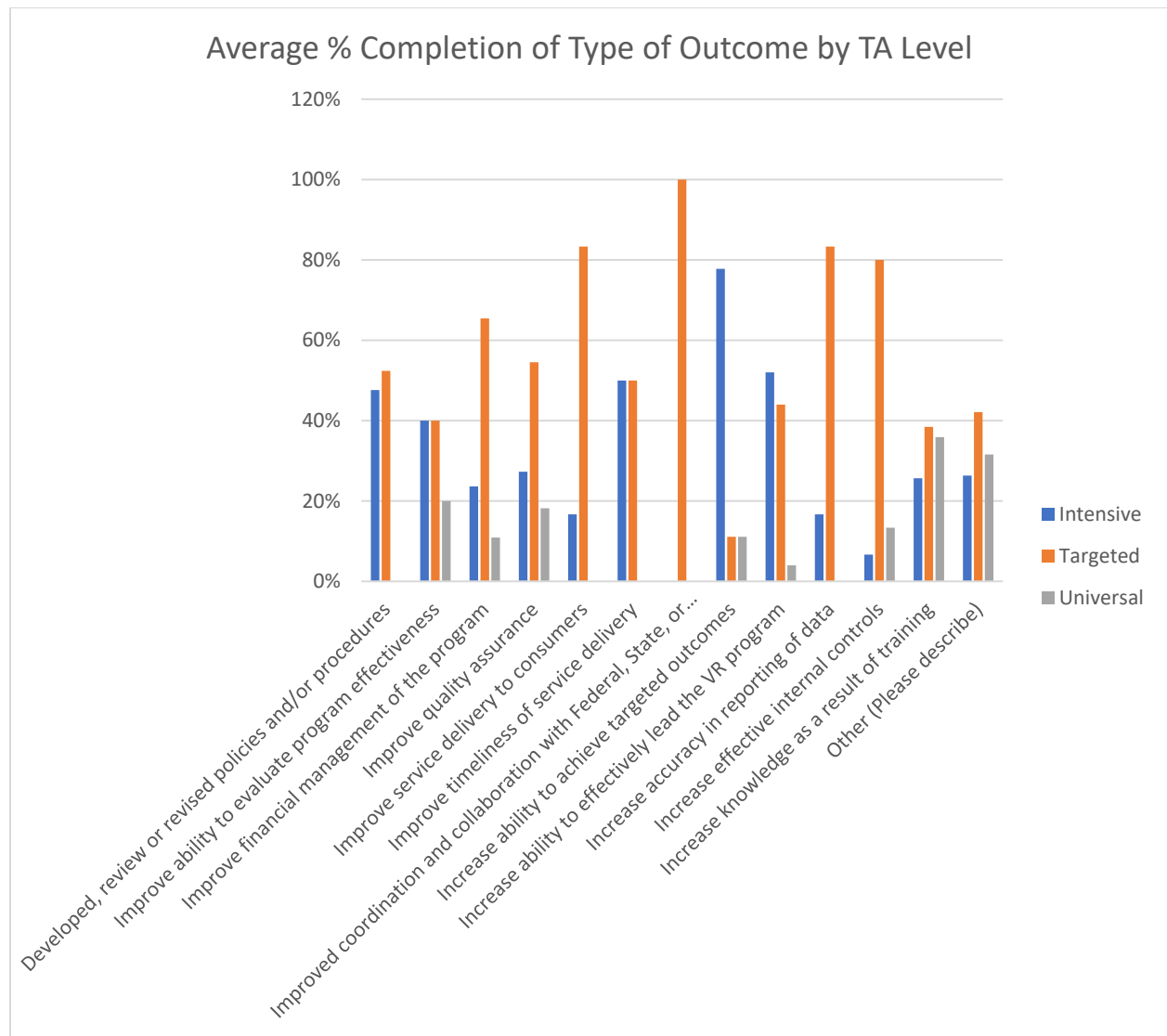
Our key informant stated that the funding agency’s measure of success for a CoP is the continued participation in meetings. He is looking forward to the results of our study so he can have a broader evaluation of the program and can utilize the results to improve the functioning of the CoP. One idea for additional data in the future would be to collect the attendance rate of the participants for certain topics, which may convey the relative value of the CoP and the specific topics to the participants.

As the focus groups and key informant interview evolved, we changed the scripts to build on the flow of the conversation. One question we added to both focus groups, based on the proliferation of positive and supportive statements noted above is, “What opportunities are there for improving the CoP?” One opportunity noted was to expand outreach to bring more members into the CoP. In our key informant interview, the interviewee highlighted the importance of recruiting members who are engaged in the implementation of CE, not just considering it, so this may be a limiting factor to growing the CoP without diluting its value. A second participant noted that it would be helpful to provide a resource center for the CoP that contains contact information, recordings of CoP meetings, and other CE-related resources. Other participants implied that some or all these resources are already available. If that is the case, the improvement opportunity may be more along the lines of communication regarding the resources or ease of accessing the resources.

In follow-up to our observation in the literature review about connecting the supply side of CE (i.e., rehabilitation agencies) with the demand side (i.e., employers), we asked participants if they thought these connections would improve their ability to implement CE in their states. A couple of participants thought these connections would be helpful, while some others thought this might be too complicated due to the large number and variety of employers.

Remaining QM CoPs will be evaluated in Years 3-5.

## D. Outcomes Identified in TA Tracker System



## E. Reflections and Recommendations

The TA Tracker System customized for the VRTAC-QM went live in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of Year 2, allowing for improved recoding of TA provided by subcategories within the main topic areas, the nature of TA provided (consultation, facilitation, etc.), and the mode of TA. In addition, outcomes relevant to the work of QM could be recorded, as well as their progress. This allows for evaluation of outcome attainment not just for Intensive TA, but where appropriate, Targeted TA and Universal TA as well.

Once again, the pattern of high volume of TA to agencies/states in intensive status or soon to be intensive status demonstrated itself. We can see this as a reflection of both increasing need from an SVRA that inevitably leads to an ITAA and also as a reality for agencies during the latter part of project years when signing new ITAAs waits for a new project year because of TA Team capacity. High volume is demonstrated in other ways as well: the metrics for time spent and the numbers reached by TA are very impressive, largely representing Targeted TA. While Intensive TA work is captured in the tracker, much of it is captured within tailored “workplans” that do not record the same information about reach, time, mode, etc. In Year 3, it is recommended that discussions about the various tracking systems be revisited to understand how each is being operationalized and that data capture is comprehensive without being redundant and burdensome for the TA Team.

An evaluation of the CE CoP, QM’s longest running CoP, demonstrated strong perceptions of ongoing value, with an interest in growing the group further but for those with genuine interest in implementation of CE not just those “curious” to learn more. True to its moniker, the CoP has become a solid community of entities engaged in a common practice and learning as they implement from each other. Discussions with respect to other QM CoPs have entailed consideration of cohorts, mentoring, and limited timeframes with tangible product expectations and these approaches may be worth considering with other QM CoPs. Remaining CoPs will be evaluated in Year 3.

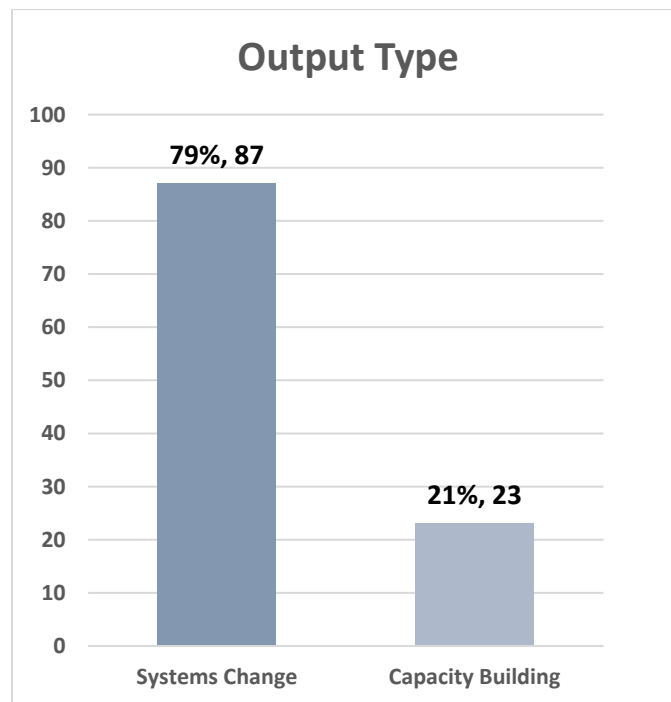
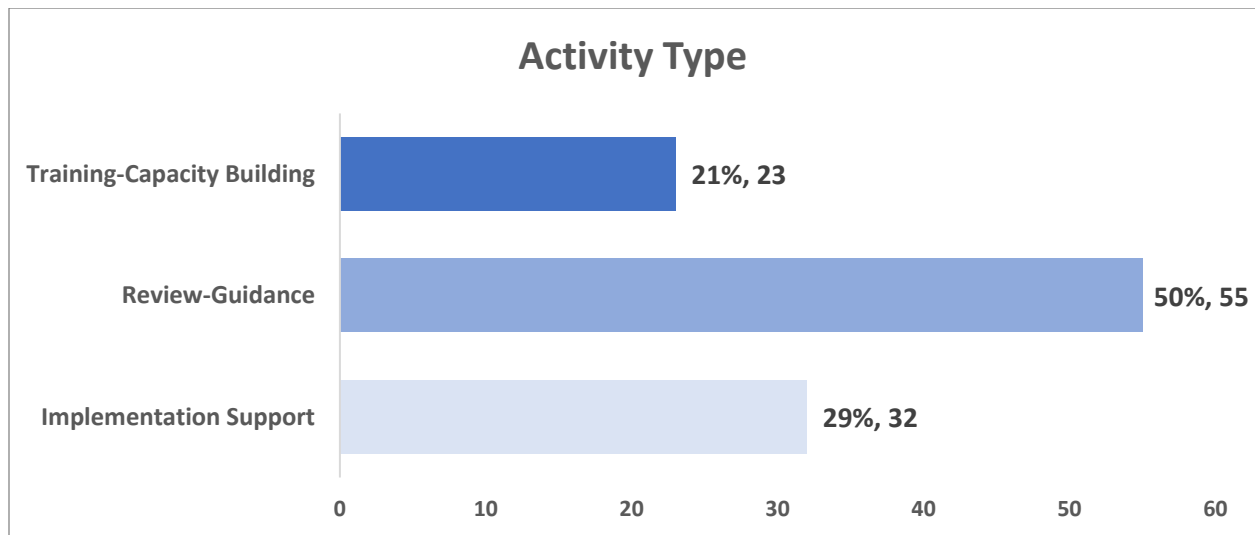
Finally, the custom QM TA Tracker allows for outcomes to be identified in connection with TA provided, and for TA Team members to revisit entries and update the completion status of those outcomes. As noted above, it is recommended that discussion occur in Year 3 about use of tracking systems and as part of that discussion, the need for adding to pre-defined outcomes may be worthwhile and reduce the need for use of the “other” category that then requires further explanation by an individual making an entry in the system. If there are common outcomes not listed, it would be efficient to add them.



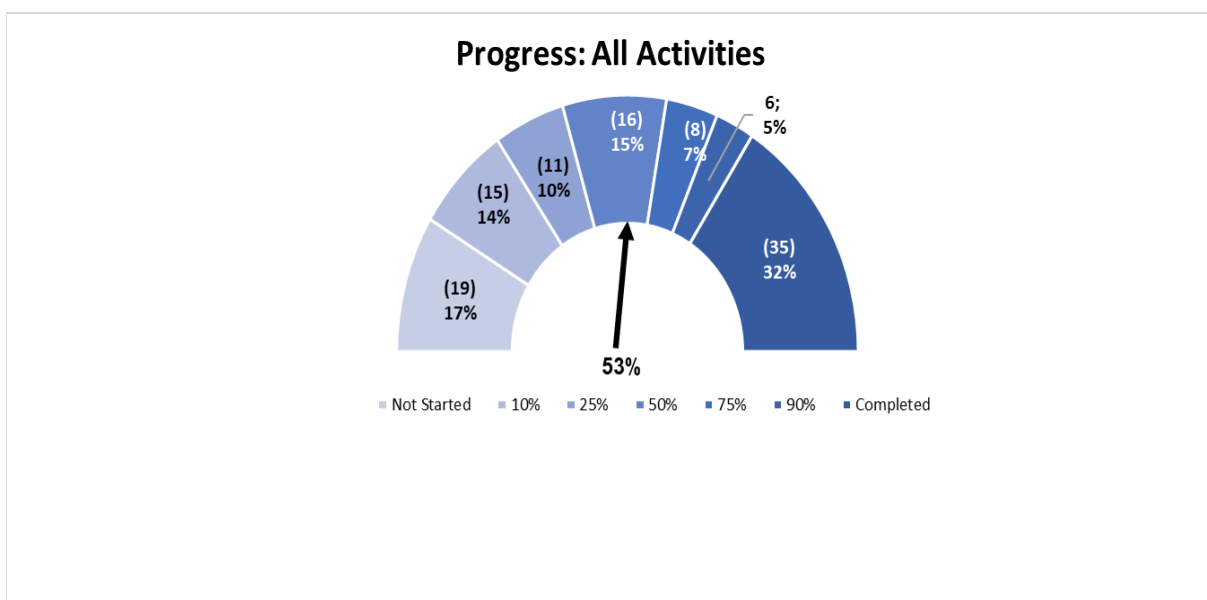
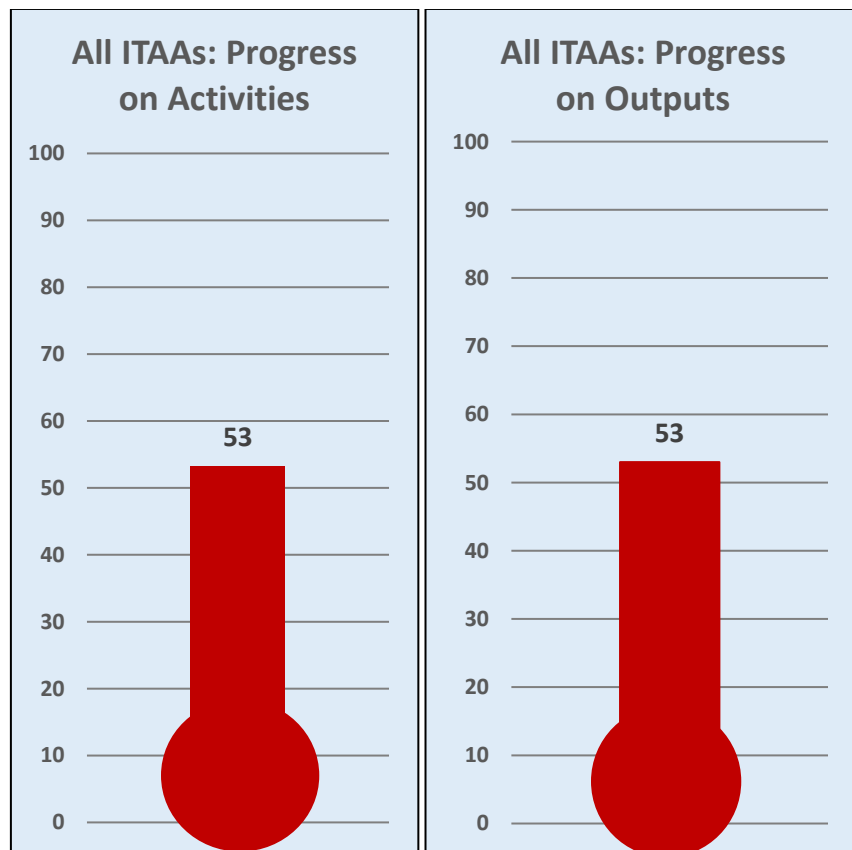
# **Intensive Technical Assistance**

## V. INTENSIVE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

The following charts present abbreviated, infographic dashboard style updates on ITAA progress both overall (across all ITAAs) and by State. On this page, a summary of progress for activities and outputs are presented through the lenses of “type of activity” and “type of output.” The remaining charts in this section include thermometer charts and speedometer charts presenting overall progress, progress by SVRA, and progress by priority level. In addition, dates of completion and length of time implementing ITAAs for each state are presented to provide context related to time when considering progress metrics.



## A. Overall Progress on ITAA Activities and Outputs



As progress for individual SVRAs is considered, it is important to reflect on the timeframes for progress:

AGENCY	ITAA DATE	Time ITAA in Place
KS-C	March 26, 2021	18 months
DE-B	May 11, 2021	17 months
MT-C	June 4, 2021	16 months
PA-C	June 28, 2021	15 months
MD-C	Oct. 15, 2021	11.5 months
AR-B	Jan. 5, 2022	9 months
WA-B	January 12, 2022	8.5 months
WY-C	Feb. 15, 2022	7.5 months
HI-C	April 6, 2022	6 months
FL-G	April 19, 2022	5.5 months
SC-G	May 10, 2022	5 months
NM-G	August 15, 2022	1.5 months

Agency	Community Partnerships	Fiscal Mgmt	General Mgmt	Pre-ETS	VR Program & Regulations	WIOA Performance Accountability	Total
KS-C		10%		38%	75%	50%	57%
DE-B		88%					88%
MT-C	25%	33%			70%	58%	54%
PA-C		10%		92%	89%	79%	72%
MD-C					53%		53%
AR-B		69%	50%				68%
WA-B			0%		33%	18%	19%
WY-C		61%	0%				56%
HI-C				100%	67%		75%
FL-G					2%		2%
SC-G		31%			50%		36%
NM-G		0%			10%	25%	11%

### *DE-B: Year One*

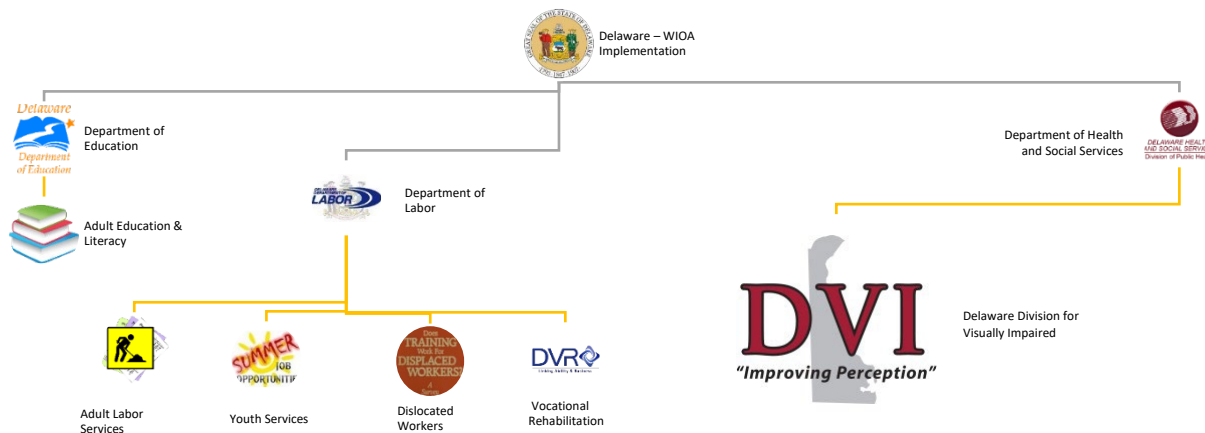
#### **Background**

The Delaware Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI) is a specialized rehabilitation agency with a mission to provide educational, vocational, and technical support to empower and foster independence for Delawareans with visual impairments. DVI is the designated State unit (DSU) situated within the DE Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS). The DHSS provides support for all data and fiscal reporting for DVI, as well as 11 other units. DVI is comprised of five organizational units providing services to visually impaired individuals including Vocational Rehabilitation, Education, Independent Living Services, the Business Enterprise Program, and Support Services (Orientation and Mobility, Accessible Materials, Assistive Technology, and Low Vision Services). DVI is a small agency which values teamwork, quality services, respect, innovation, fostering independence, and integrity.

DVI currently operates outside of an order of selection, which itself is a strength. Nevertheless, DVI has faced challenges with reporting, internal controls, fiscal management, and the overall implementation and development of their combined state plan. The latter of these was rooted in the lack of involvement by an underrepresented and under-resourced State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). The issues highlighted with the SRC initiated areas of concern for the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in their 2020 monitoring report of DVI, as well as the aforementioned areas. The monitoring reporting served as a catalyst for change for DVI and led to the continued engagement with national technical assistance partners.

The required five core programs under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) are encapsulated within the Department of Labor, Department of Health and Social Services, and Department of Education (see Figure 1). In addition to these WIOA core programs efforts, Delaware has passed several key initiatives to advance the employment of people with disabilities including Employment First legislation with House Bills 319 and 241, the authorization of the Employment First Oversight Commission Title 19, Chapter 7, Subchapter V Employment First Act, and an employer tax credit.

**Figure 1: Delaware WIOA Core Programs**



## Current Landscape

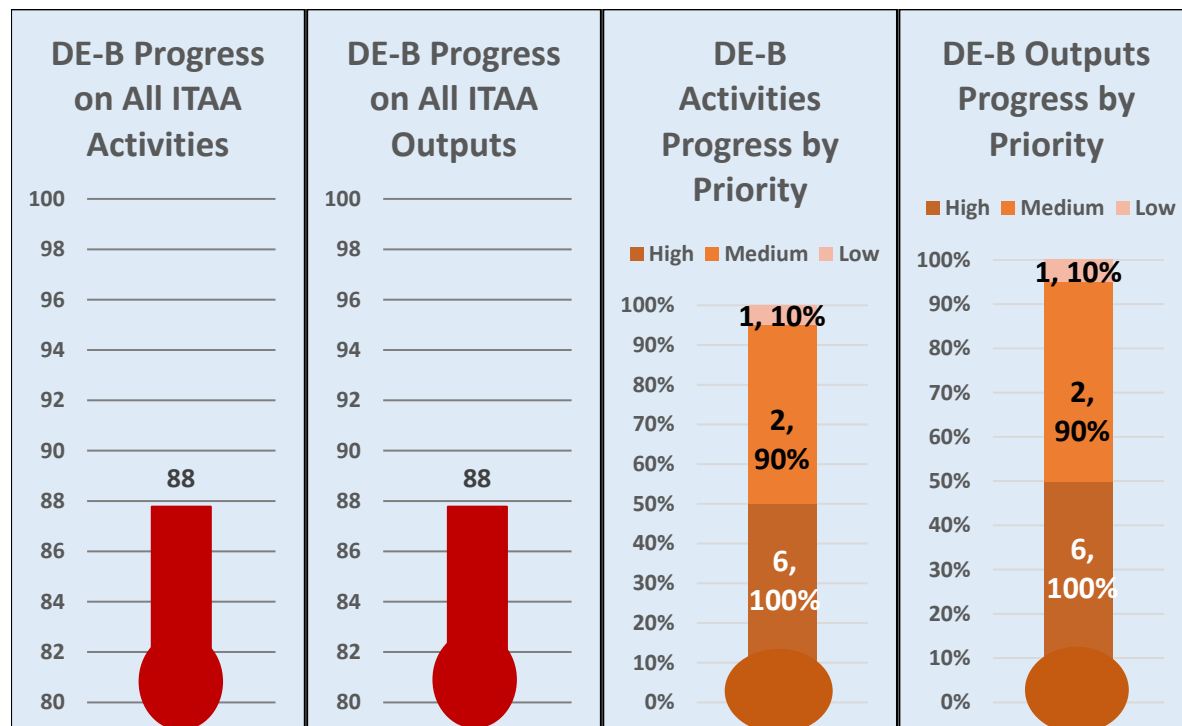
As noted above, in 2020 the Delaware Division for the Visually Impaired received their monitoring from the RSA. The monitoring itself took longer than expected due to the COVID-19-induced health pandemic. However, once the report was received it served as a guiding document for change. One primary recommendation by RSA was for DVI to continue the work the state began under WINTAC, with the newly formed VRTAC-QM, QE, and the NTACT-C. The areas highlighted in the report included a) internal controls/reporting, b) fiscal management, c) State Rehabilitation Council configuration and involvement, d) an overall lack of clear policies and procedures, and e) training of staff. Areas of concern included the lack of a comprehensive and streamlined management information system (MIS), which led to errors of duplication, inaccurate recording, and non-compliance with the reporting requirements under WIOA. Furthermore, RSA highlighted issues with the collection and analysis of financial data, and lack of timely and accurate reporting of financial expenditures. Given these issues, DVI quickly engaged the VRTAC-QM to develop an Intensive Technical Assistance Agreement (ITAA) to address these core issues.

## Plan for Improvement

Since the receipt of the monitoring report, DVI has taken quick and extensive action to implement a strong plan for change to address the aforementioned areas of need. Specifically, DVI has taken several steps to address internal controls, including a system to review RSA-911 data, revising, and reorganizing the policy and procedures manual. In addition, DVI is partnering with the VRTAC-QM through the implementation of an ITAA to address the areas of fiscal management, the development of strong policies and procedures, and overall systems improvement. Overall, the areas addressed in the ITAA are in alignment with the needs and

gaps outlined in the monitoring report and will serve as a foundation for positive enhancement of the DVI programs and services.

Since the work began, DVI has experienced a change in leadership during year 1 of the work with VRTAC-QM. Sandi Miller was replaced by Debbie Talley.



### KS-C: Year One

#### Background

Kansas Rehabilitation Services (KRS) is a combined vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency, situated within the Department of Children and Families. With a goal of gainful employment and self-sufficiency for Kansans with disabilities, KRS vocational rehabilitation services are the foundation of efforts to achieve the goal of competitive integrated employment. The new leadership in KRS (Director Dan Decker, Deputy Director Elizabeth “Beth” Van Vleck, and Deputy Director Dennis Ford), are committed to improving KRS and serving individuals with disabilities, although their new director does not have a background in VR. The state organizational structure is stable and the relationship with parent agency is characterized as committed and positive. The required five core programs under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) (see Figure 1) are housed under three state departments including a) Title I programs, dislocated worker and youth programs, and Title II Wagner-Peyser programs within

the Department of Commerce; b) Title II adult education and literacy programs within the Kansas Board of Regents; and c) Title IV vocational programs within the Department of Children and Families.

**Figure 1: Kansas WIOA Core Programs**



Additionally, Kansas has a strong history of working to advance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. In 2011, The Employment First Oversight Commission was established by the state legislature through the Employment First law (K.S.A. 44-1136-38), and continues to meet in the present day.

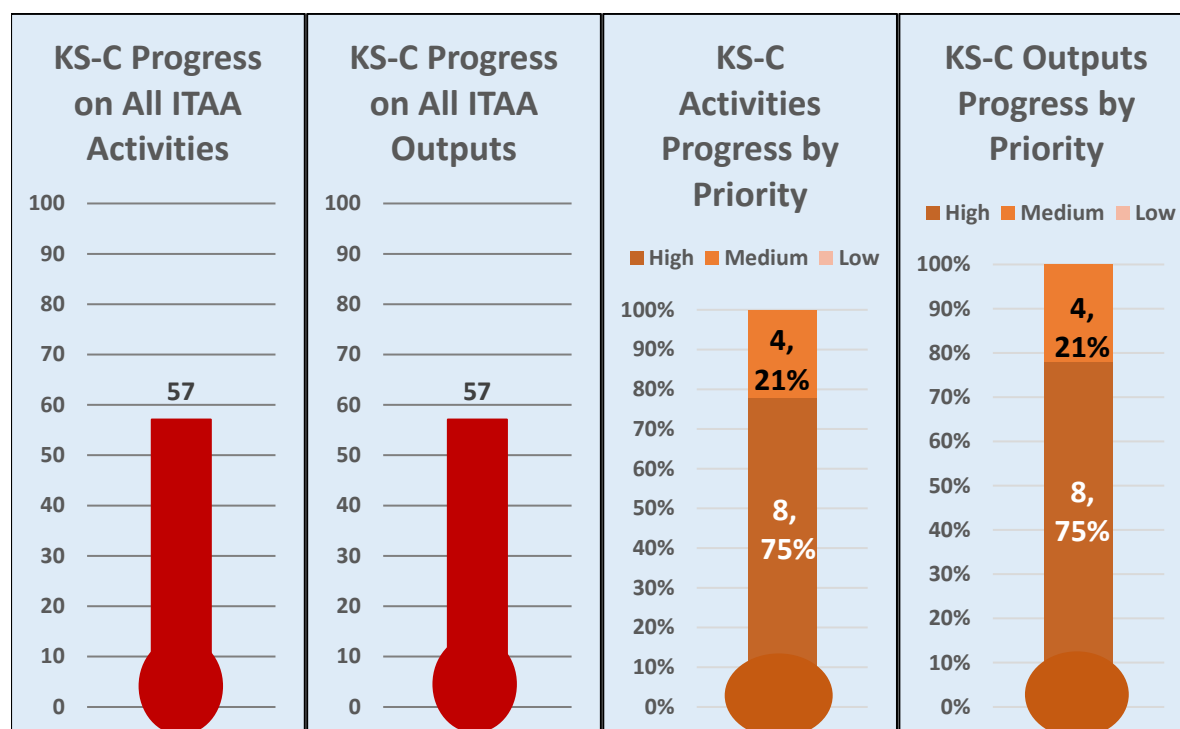
### Current Landscape

KRS initially reached out to VRTAC-QM as a result of their 2019 monitoring, and subsequent need to initiate a corrective action plan inclusive of technical assistance. In response to this request, the VRTAC-QM conducted a SWOT analysis in early 2021 to assess strengths and weaknesses in the program, and to leverage the opportunities within KRS to maximize the agency's effectiveness. Through the SWOT, several strengths and weaknesses were identified. KRS strengths include a) a staff committed to advancing the work, b) a new management structure, c) strong training and development, and d) executive branch support of the program. In contrast, the weaknesses highlighted included a) low wages for KRS staff, and the subsequent impact on community relationships, b) RSA-911 case service reporting errors, c) an old CMS that is not user friendly, c) a struggle to expend 15% Pre-ETS reserve and general budget, and d) having the time and resources to conduct the training needed on an ongoing basis. The 2019 monitoring highlighted additional challenges for KRS including issues with a) client attrition, particularly for youth under 25, b) measurement of employment outcomes, and c) data Integrity. In addition, KRS is in need of reviewing policies related to the residency requirements; internal controls; arbitrary age requirements and time frames for provision of transition services and Pre-ETS; reporting of supported employment outcomes; prior approval; obligations and expenditures not properly assigned to correct period of performance; and inadequate MOUs and funding agreements.



## Plan for Improvement

Given these challenges, KRS worked with the VRTAC-QM to develop an Intensive Technical Assistance Agreement (ITAA). Work on the ITAA began in January 2021 to increase program performance, develop and implement internal controls, improve accurate and valid reporting, and increase training for staff. Thus far, the work has included a training needs assessment; training on eligibility determination and other areas; policy and procedure reviews and revisions related to case processing and service delivery; review and development of internal controls related to case processing and service delivery; review of performance evaluation standards for VR Counselors aligned with WIOA standards; analysis of VR agency readiness and capacity to track and report data (i.e., RSA-911 and supporting documentation) for the WIOA Performance Indicators; review, development, and revision of written internal controls necessary for the WIOA Performance Accountability System; assistance with developing strategies for data analysis and data-informed decision-making (visual analytics – Tableau, tracking reports, etc.) for meeting or exceeding WIOA performance established targets; and, establishing a method and policy for rate-setting and evaluating the performance of service providers. Overall, KRS has taken clear and decisive action to address the areas highlighted in the monitoring report and the SWOT, to effectively position the agency for a much stronger future.



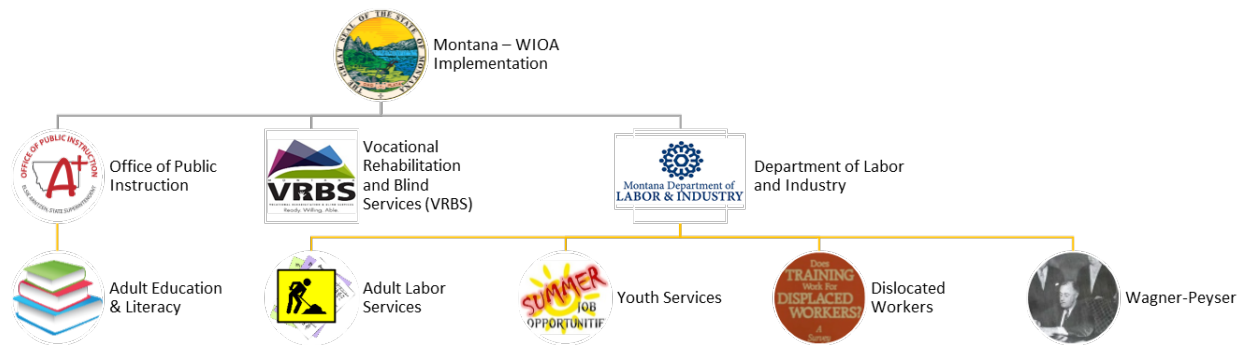
## MT-C: Year One

### Background

The Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRBS) is a combined vocational rehabilitation agency, situated within the Disability Employment and Transitions Division of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. VRBS has a mission to promote opportunities for Montanans with disabilities to have rewarding careers and achieve maximum personal potential. VRBS is advantaged by the stable leadership of Chanda Hermanson, Administrator of the Disability Employment and Transitions Division, although there is some uncertainty about the future placement of the agency. While VRBS has a strong mission and vision, the agency is currently operating under an Order of Selection with suspension of all new entries into Disability Level Order Categories 3, 2, and 1. This requires additional coordination and referral for services with other state agency partners.

The remaining required five core programs under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) are encapsulated within the Montana Department of Labor and Industry and the Office of Public Instruction (see Figure 1). Outside of the required core programs, Montana's Developmental Disabilities Program issued an Employment First statement whereby they embraced the philosophy of all individuals being afforded the opportunity for Competitive Integrated Employment; however, there currently is no broad scale effort to codify Employment First principles within the agencies providing employment services to individuals with disabilities.

**Figure 1: Montana WIOA Core Programs**



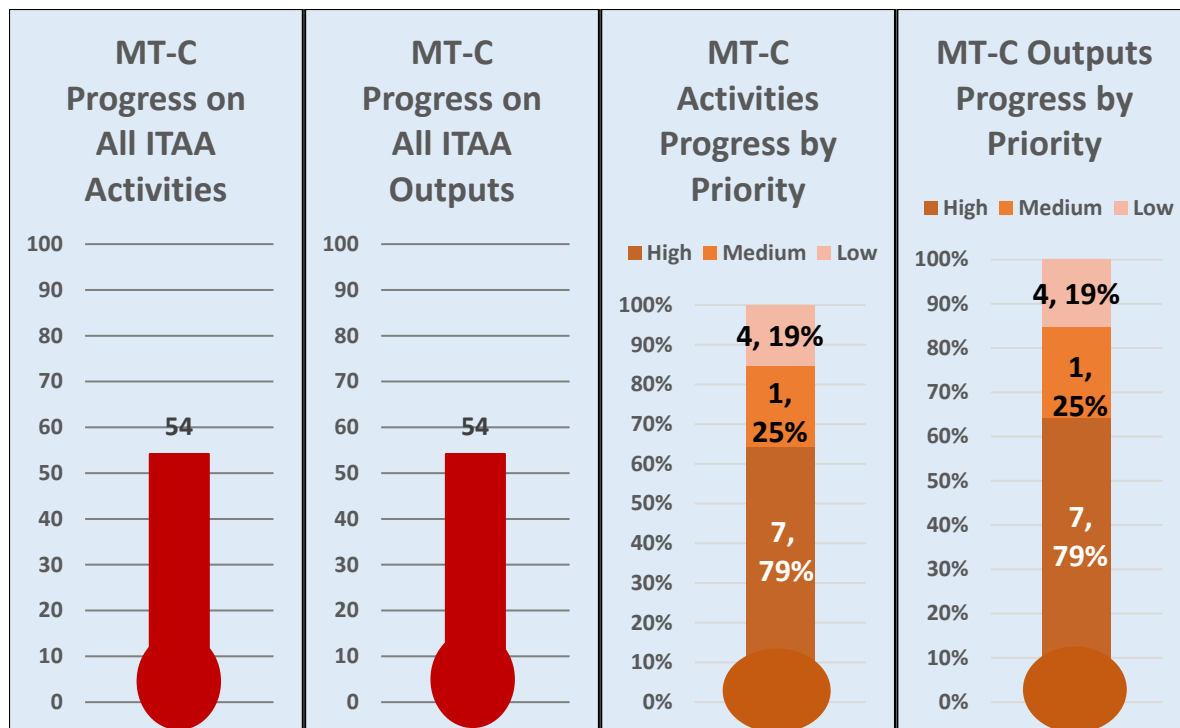
### Current Landscape

Since 2017, Montana VRBS has engaged in two processes highlighting the challenges and opportunities within the state to improve the overall functioning of the agency from the

perspective of quality management. First, the 2017 monitoring report highlighted issues related to a myriad of areas including a) eligibility determinations; b) timely individualized plans for employment development; c) staff training; d) deficiencies with data integrity, reporting, and supporting documentation; e) gaps in written policies and procedures; f) lack of effective control over federal and state funds; g) issues with meeting required matching amounts, obtaining prior approval, and unallowable expenditures; and h) challenges with provider contracts and rate setting. In response to these findings, Montana VRBS has taken a series of actions, including the engagement of the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center – Quality Management (VRTAC-QM) to obtain support. In early 2021, the VRTAC-QM conducted a SWOT analysis with the leadership of Montana VRBS. The SWOT process highlighted a congruent set of issues with the 2017 monitoring report, but additionally underscored other challenges for Montana VRBS. These challenges included a need for enhanced training for the provider network, training on benefits planning, and increased development of the VRBS case management/reporting system, as well as challenges with the overall economy, navigating the Order of Selection, working with tribal partners, and the development of strong business partnerships.

### **Plan for Improvement**

The 2020 State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) report to the Governor highlights several actions taken by Montana VRBS to improve the functioning of the agency, as well as the overall services to individuals with disabilities. First, the SRC engaged with Montana State University Billings – Center for Inclusive Education to develop new customer satisfaction surveys. Further, Montana VRBS collaborated with the Stout Rehabilitation Institute to assist in rewriting the programs' administrative rules. It is anticipated significant changes and additions will occur, which provide a strong foundation for VRBS to continue to work with the VRTAC-QM in the implementation of an Intensive Technical Assistance Agreement (ITAA). VRBS has sought assistance from the VRTAC-QM to address many of the program, performance, fiscal, and resource management issues highlighted in the monitoring report and SWOT analysis. Consequently, given the strong synergy between the vision of the VRBS leadership, the SRC goals, and the focus of the ITAA with the VRTAC-QM, Montana VRBS appears to be poised to make substantive changes for improvement in the coming year to address the challenges existing within the state.



### PA-C: Year One

#### Background

The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is a combined vocational rehabilitation agency situated within the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. OVR operates through a network of 21 District Offices staffed with trained, professional Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors which serve Pennsylvania in all 67 counties; a vocational training center on Johnstown; and through a specialized bureau, the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services.

In recent history, OVR has been in the midst of a significant leadership change, but with this new leadership in place, the administration is focused on program and administrative improvements to ensure Pennsylvanians with disabilities are afforded the needed supports and resources to obtain and maintain employment. While OVR is initiating significant changes, the agency is currently operating under an Order of Selection with only 1 of 3 priority categories open. OVR's strong partnership with WIOA partners serves as a key strength to combatting this challenge, through enhanced opportunities for referrals and coordination of supports.

The required five core programs under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) are encapsulated within the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry and Department of Education Instruction (see Figure 1). In addition to the WIOA core programs' efforts to support

the employment of persons with disabilities, Pennsylvania enacted Act 36 in 2018, the Employment First Act to provide training, education, and support services to help individuals reach their personal goals. Employment First requires any group receiving public funding to ensure that employment is the main focus for education, training, or support services for anyone with a disability who is eligible to work. In response to the E1 Act, a three year plan was put in place in 2019 to carry out the vision of the act, and based upon the 2021 report, it is clear the state plans to continue their collective efforts in making this vision a reality.

**Figure 1: Pennsylvania WIOA Core Programs**



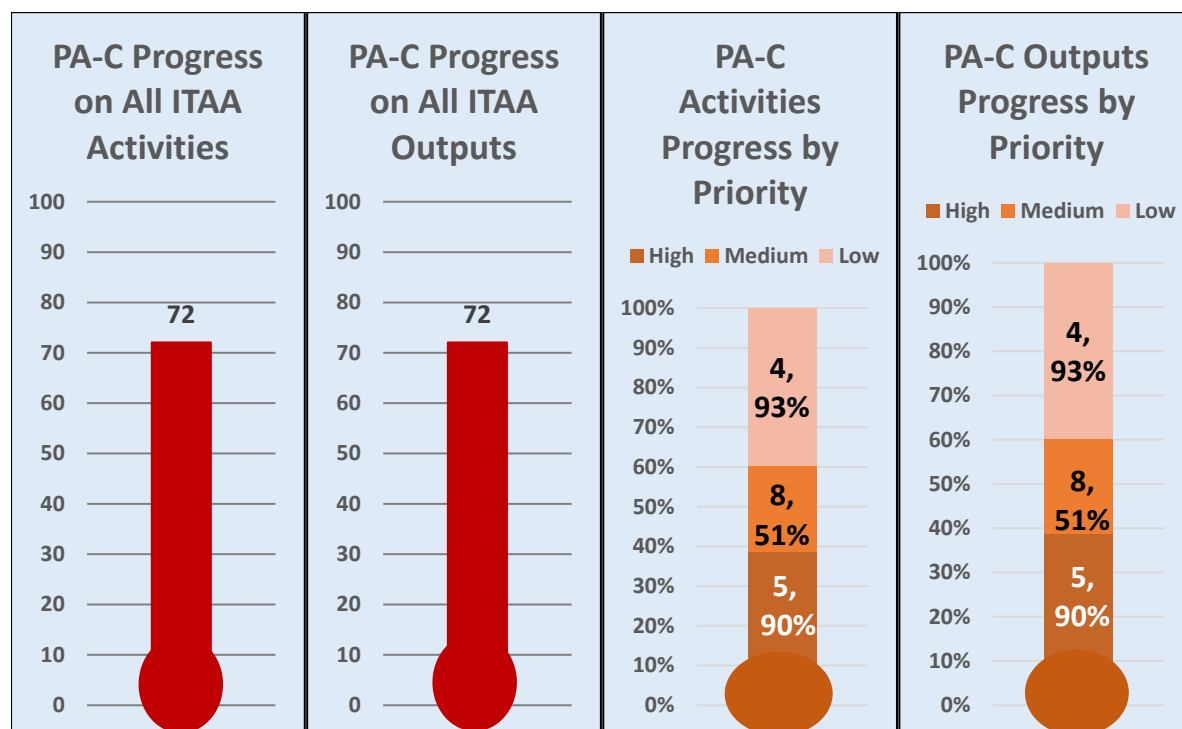
## Current Landscape

In 2019, the OVR program received their monitoring report from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The monitoring report set the stage for the work OVR needed to address in the year following. The two overarching areas highlighted in the report were a) internal controls/reporting and b) fiscal management. Areas of need cited included record documentation, eligibility determinations, issues with pre-application process, compliance with federal and state statutes, inaccurate reporting of program income, and insufficient protection of personal identifying information. Additional issues included the inconsistent application of funds related to the period of performance; incorrect sourcing and obligation of funds; and an inability to determine if the maintenance of effort, match, and reservation of funds occurred appropriately. Further, as would be expected, through OVR's engagement of the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center – Quality Management (VRTAC-QM), and subsequent utilization of a SWOT analysis, similar issues were highlighted with the exception of the focused area of record keeping. However, other key factors for organizational success were identified like succession planning, training and development of staff, and utilization of more evidence-based practices.

## Plan for Improvement

The OVR has taken quick and extensive action to implement a strong plan for change to address the aforementioned areas of need. Specifically, OVR collaborated with the VRTAC-QM through the implementation of an Intensive Technical Assistance Agreement (ITAA). Areas addressed in the ITAA focus heavily on the areas outlined in the SWOT analysis performed by the VRTAC-QM including training, succession planning, data reporting, internal controls, data management, pre-employment transition services, and fiscal and resource management. This strong alignment between the identified gaps in the monitoring report and the focus of the ITAA will truly set the stage for the work of the VRTAC-QM to make substantive changes for improvement in the coming year.

Mid-year 2022, the entire leadership team was replaced by new personnel. By that point, most of the work with VRTAC-QM had been completed so the staff turnover had little impact on workplan activities. In fact, the new leadership team seems to require less technical assistance than the original team.



## AR-B: Year Two

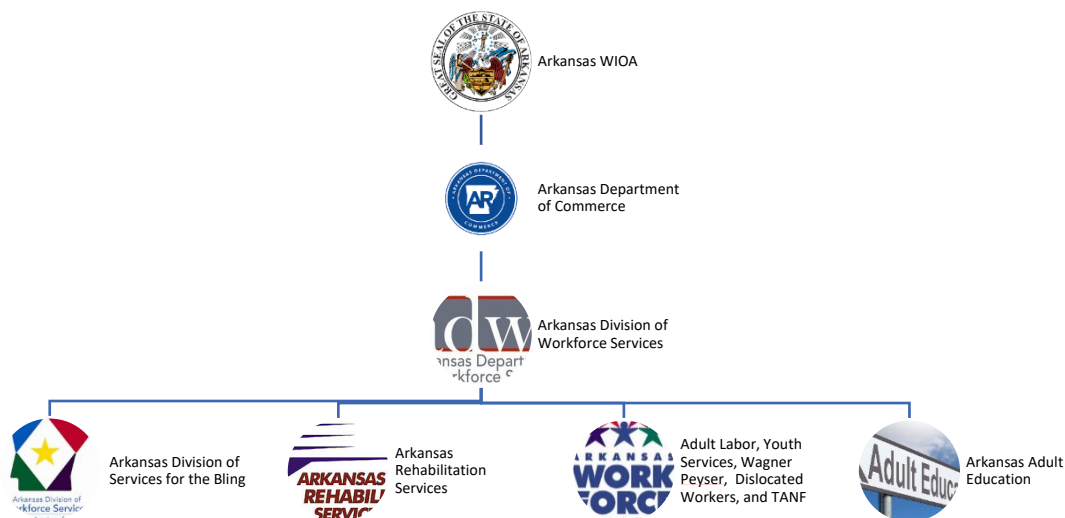
### Background

The Arkansas Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) is a specialized agency with a mission to enhance the personal and economic independence of persons who are blind or severely visually impaired by assisting individuals in securing or maintaining employment, teaching skills to enable independence, and prevent or stabilize blindness where possible. DSB is the designated State unit (DSU) situated within the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services (ADWS), a division of the Department of Commerce. DSB provides services in seven areas defined as Vocational Rehabilitation, Transition, Supported Employment, Older Individuals Who Are Blind, Business Engagement, Independent Living Rehabilitation, and Information Reading. DSB is a small agency which values teamwork, trust, consistency, quality work, authenticity, follow through, and effective prioritization of work in the work of the central office staff.

DSB currently operates outside of an order of selection, which itself is a strength. Nevertheless, DSB has faced challenges with hiring and retention, training, communication, accountability, and the consistent application of procedures. The general lack of trust between field staff and management underlies many of these challenges. Additionally, the move from Department of Human Services (DHS) to the Department of Commerce has been challenging due to the lack of policies and procedures, in areas such as information technology, human resources, and fiscal, that had been well defined in DHS. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) 2020 monitoring visit of DSB highlighted Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), performance, and fiscal management.

Since a recent reorganization of DSB by moving it from the Department of Human Services to ADWS, all of the required five core programs under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) are encapsulated within ADWS.

**Figure 1: Arkansas WIOA Core Programs**

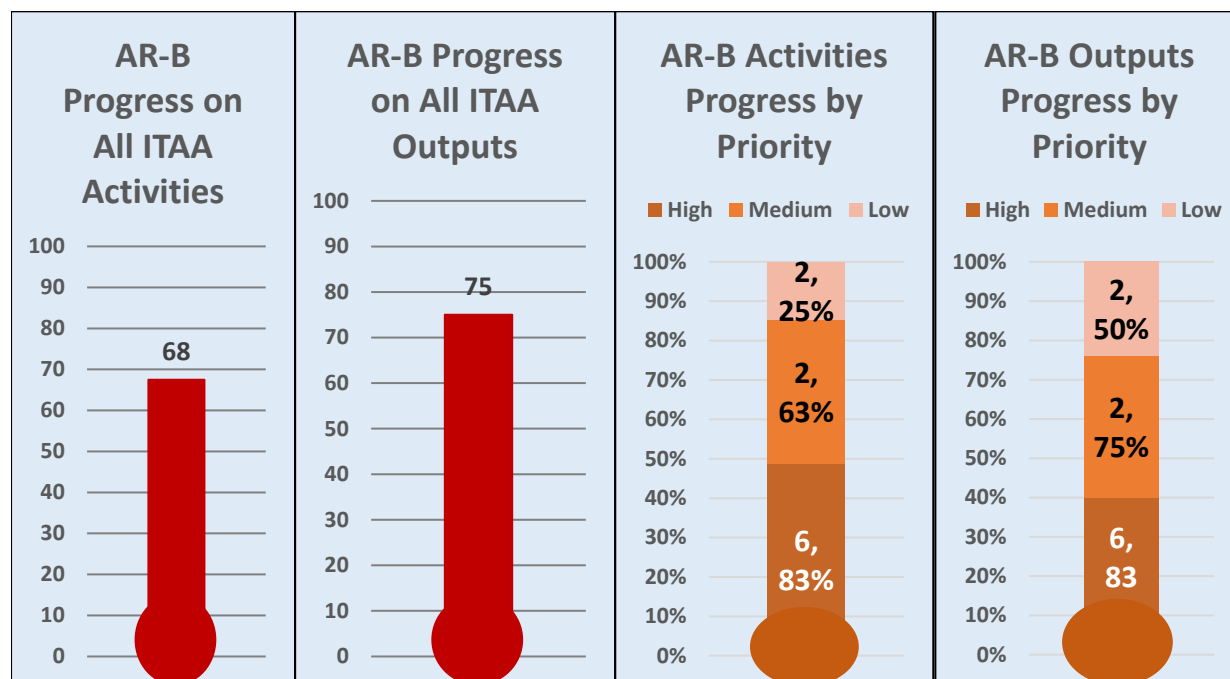


## Current Landscape

In August, 2021 the Arkansas Services for the Blind received their monitoring from the RSA and submitted a corrective action plan (CAP) in December, 2021. Once the report was received it served as a guiding document for change. The CAP highlighted five actions in which DBS would obtain necessary technical assistance from VRTAC-QM, many of which were identified due to lack of policies, procedures, and trained staff. Those areas included a) internal controls and reporting compliance, b) Pre-ETS, c) expenditures, d) payment rates, e) contract development, and f) reporting of non-Federal expenditures. Given these issues, DBS quickly engaged the VRTAC-QM to develop an Intensive Technical Assistance Agreement (ITAA) to address these core issues.

## Plan for Improvement

Since the receipt of the monitoring report, DBS reached out to VRTAC-QM for TA and started the SWOT process. Shortly after the CAP was submitted in December, 2021, DBS signed the ITAA with VRTAC-QM. As of July, 2022, DBS has taken initial steps to address financial corrective actions that included updating policies and procedures for grant tracking, internal order coding, carryover requirements, State match, and maintenance of effort. All corrective action items are still open but progress is being made. Overall, the areas addressed in the ITAA are in alignment with the needs and gaps outlined in the monitoring report, and will serve as a foundation for positive enhancement of the DBS programs and services.





## FL-G: Year Two

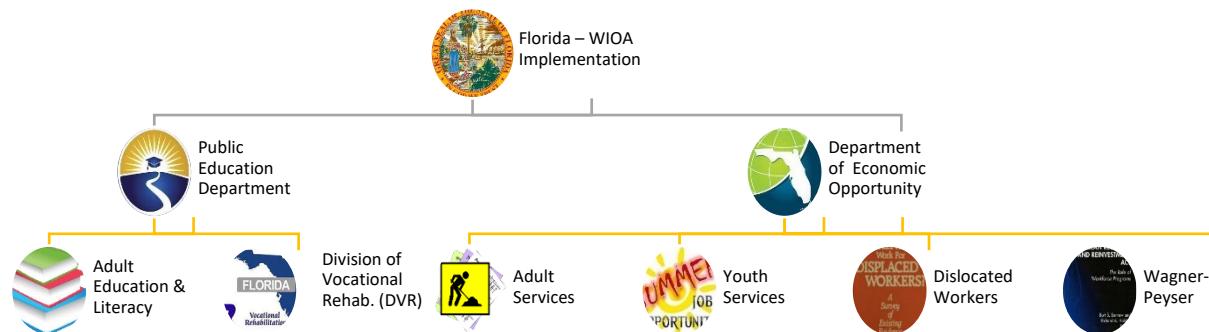
### Background

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (FDVR) is a general Vocational Rehabilitation agency located within the Florida Department of Education. FDVR includes a headquarters office, seven area offices, and 96-unit offices, which serve all 67 of Florida's counties. These offices are staffed with trained, professional Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. FDVR also collaborates with the Florida Rehabilitation Council (FRC), which oversees the agency. While FRC is not an official governance board, it is required by federal law to review, analyze, and advise FDVR's programs and policies.

Data collection is both FDVR's key strength and weakness. While FDVR runs numerous data reports, the agency seeks to find new ways to utilize the data that they collect to improve program operations and participant outcomes. The agency has experienced several leadership changes. In the past year, Brent McNeal was appointed director, and Vicky Gaitanis was named deputy director. FDVR has recently experienced significant staffing reductions, resulting in an OOS status. While they initially had no priority categories open, they were recently able to open two due to increased funding from the state government.

The required five core programs under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) are located within the Department of Economic Opportunity and the Florida Department of Education for the Division of Blind Services, the Division of Career and Adult Education, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Services for these five core programs can be found within Florida's career centers that are designed to be one-stop workforce development hubs, providing connections to all core programs to serve all Florida job seekers, including veterans, TANF recipients, SNAP recipients, and persons with disabilities. Some services offered by Florida's career centers can be accessed through mobile units or online (employflorida.com), which further increases the accessibility of these services to people with disabilities and those from marginalized communities.

**Figure 1: Florida WIOA Core Programs**

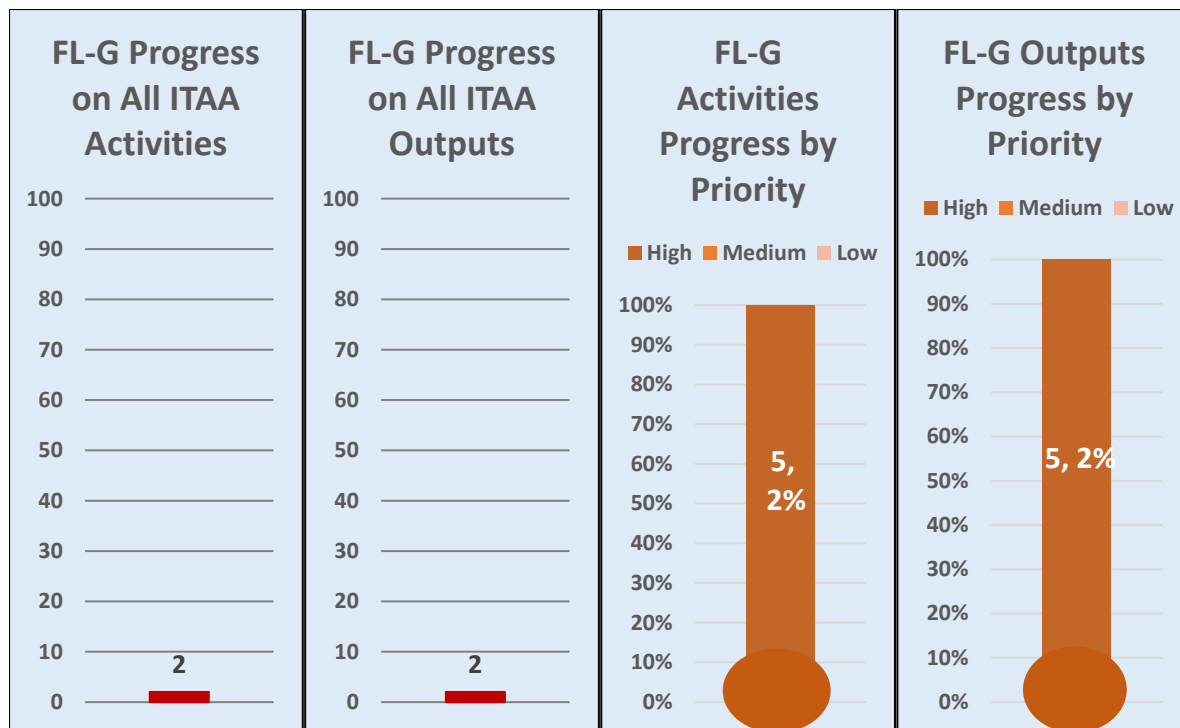


## **Current Landscape**

FDVR initially reached out to VRTAC-QM seeking assistance with reviewing the data reports that they run and developing techniques to identify potential areas for program improvement. After working with the VRTAC-QM team, FDVR determined that an intensive TA agreement (ITAA) was necessary. FDVR has faced several challenges related to staffing over the past few years, including a lack of communication between staff and the leadership team, low morale, and a 15% staff vacancy rate. These staffing issues are partly the result of insufficient pay/salary levels, which were set based on budget calculations rather than federal guidelines. The agency also lacks adequate internal controls, regularly fails to meet the 60-day application to eligibility and the 90-day eligibility to IPE benchmarks, and has a history of turning away individuals with severe and persistent mental illness. Despite these challenges, FDVR has created and maintained many strong partnerships, developed a successful pre-employment transition service program primarily due to its successful collaborations with schools, and fostered effective outreach strategies to minority communities based on race, disability type, and geography. The majority of FDVR's staff has been with the agency for many years and are dedicated, organized, and have significant institutional knowledge.

## **Plan for Improvement**

FDVR is making significant progress in developing methods to analyze their data to improve both programmatic and participant outcomes. The agency has also successfully reduced the number of individuals on their OOS waiting list and has improved their pre-ETS outcomes. The agency has requested additional technical assistance in the following areas: identify areas needing improvement through the use of agency data and analytics; develop strategies to utilize visual analytics for data analysis and data informed-decision making; create and/or revise performance evaluation standards for VR Counselors (and other staff as needed) reflecting agency and WIOA standards; and develop and implement a program improvement plan to improve the quality of employment outcomes for VR participants.



### *HI-C: Year Two*

\*Note: During Year Two, the Fiscal Portion of the ITAA was on hold due to lack of staff at HI-C.

### **Background**

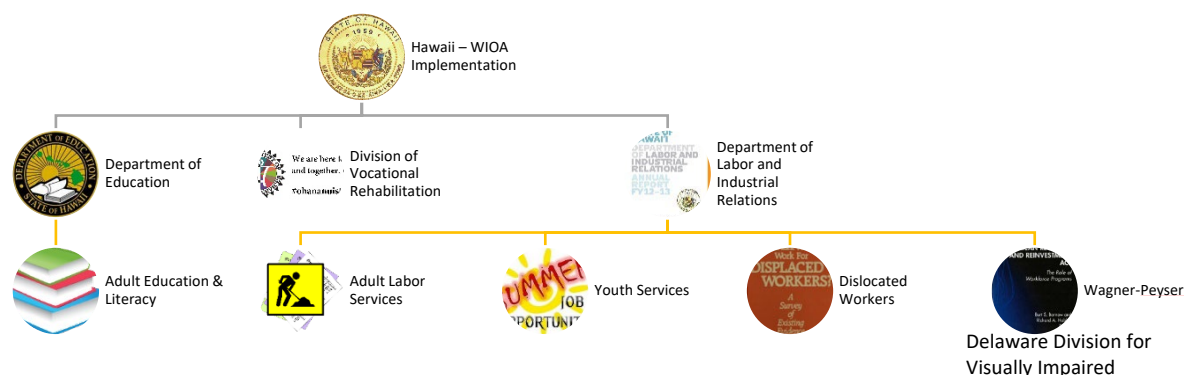
The Hawaii Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is a statewide resource for people with disabilities situated within the Hawaii Department of Human Services. DVR serves as the designated State unit (DSU) in Hawaii. DVR provides a series of services tailored to support people with disabilities in obtaining competitive integrated employment. DVR operates through an infrastructure of six branches including the disability determination branch, services for the blind branch, and the Kaua'i, Maui, O'ahu, and Hawai'i branches. Additionally, DVR works collaboratively with the core partners from the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, Department of Education, Department of Health, University of Hawaii and the Community Colleges as well as Divisions within the Department of Human Services in developing high quality services.

The required five core programs under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) are encapsulated within the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, Department of Human Services (inclusive of VR and TANF), and Department of Education (see Figure 1). In addition to these WIOA core programs efforts, the Division of Developmental Disabilities has launched an employment first initiative to advance the employment of people with developmental

disabilities, and the Workforce Development Council has a history in implementing specific disability employment initiatives funded through the U.S. Department of Labor.

DVR currently operates under the confines of an order of selection, and serves individual under only 1 of 3 priority areas. While this is a challenge, there were significant issues identified by the Rehabilitation Services Administration in the 2019 monitoring report regarding the overall programmatic and fiscal implementation of the DVR programs. The issues highlighted in the monitoring report spanned across numerous areas, and pointed to areas concern for DVR to address.

**Figure 1: Hawaii WIOA Core Programs**



## Current Landscape

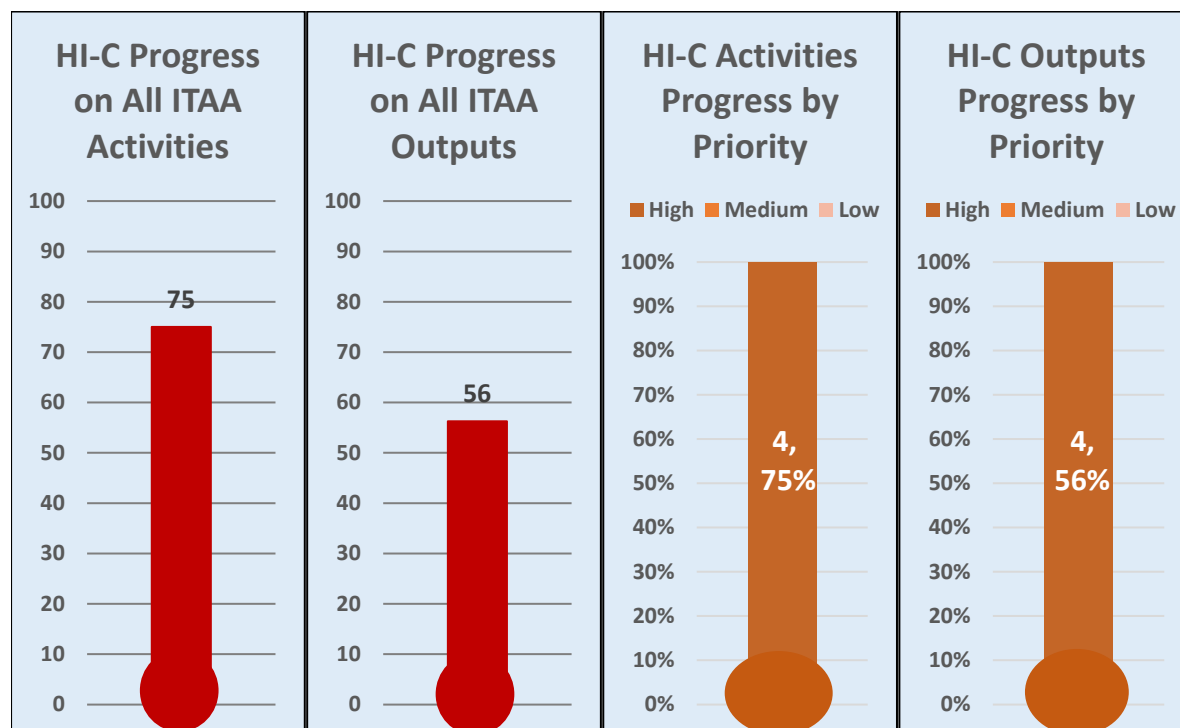
As noted above, in 2019 the Hawaii Division of Vocational Rehabilitation received their monitoring from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. This report has been the primary driver for systemic change across DVR. In response to these findings, DVR requested technical assistance from DVR directly, and subsequently engaged the VR-TAC QM in an intensive technical assistance agreement to address the areas of deficiency. These issues included untimely and incomplete documentation of activities (e.g., IPE dates, employment start dates, wage verification, etc.); program measurement; implementation of Pre-ETS (e.g., including the agreement with education missing stator language, lack of SE-VR guidelines for implementation); financial management (e.g., federal and non-federal funds); and contract development, management and oversight. In addition, RSA highlighted challenges with prior approval; and incomplete implementation of interagency requirements outlined under WIOA.

## Plan for Improvement

Since the receipt of the monitoring report, DVR has pursued a relationship with the VRTAC-QM to assist in taking immediate action to address the myriad of issues outlined in the monitoring report. Together, DVR and the VR TAC QM has developed an Intensive Technical Assistance Agreement (ITAA) to address all of the areas outlined in the monitoring report. While there is

high cross over between the ITAA and the monitoring report, acknowledging that implementation of such a robust set of change initiatives would be challenging for any system.

Since January 2022, the fiscal work has been on hold due to staff vacancies. As of September 2022, those positions were still vacant. Even though there have had some key leaders resign or take extended leave throughout the contract, the remaining work has proceeded.



### *MD-C: Year Two*

#### **Background**

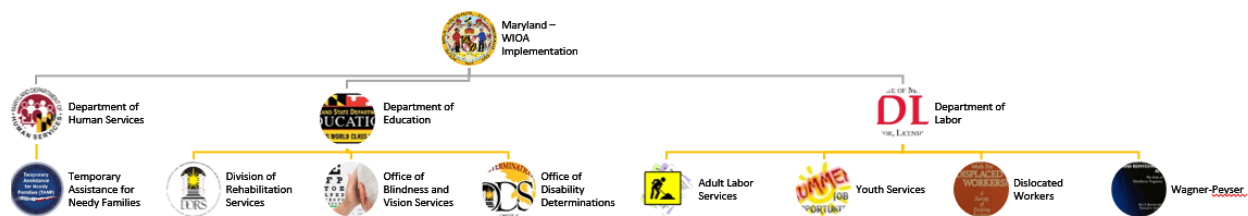
The Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) is a combined vocational rehabilitation agency situated within the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Within the agency, there are four programs, Office of Field Services, Office for Blindness & Vision Services, and Workforce & Technology Center, and Disability Determination Services. DORS serves Maryland's individuals with disabilities through a network of 5 regional offices, and 25 local offices, staffed with trained, professional Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors.

DORS senior management team is stable and strong with little change over the years, even as leadership has changed in other state agencies as state administration changes. This stability may be due to the fact they reside within the state DOE rather than at the top level of agencies in the state. They have a valued, diverse workforce reflective of the clients they serve. DORS has a positive relationship with school systems, this benefits their pre-employment transition services, and they use data and technology to improve their program and services. A request

for a demonstration of a VRTAC-QM data management tool led to the request for intensive technical assistance from VRTAC-QM. They have also actively worked to improve their use of data in response to their 2017 RSA monitoring visit.

The required five core programs under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) are provided through the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Human Services, the State Department for Education, and the Governor’s Workforce Development Board along with local workforce partners. The state also added the Department of Housing and Community Development, the DOL Division of Unemployment Insurance, and the Senior Community Services Employment Program to the state plan to create a more inclusive approach to services.

**Figure 1: Maryland WIOA Core Programs**



## Current Landscape

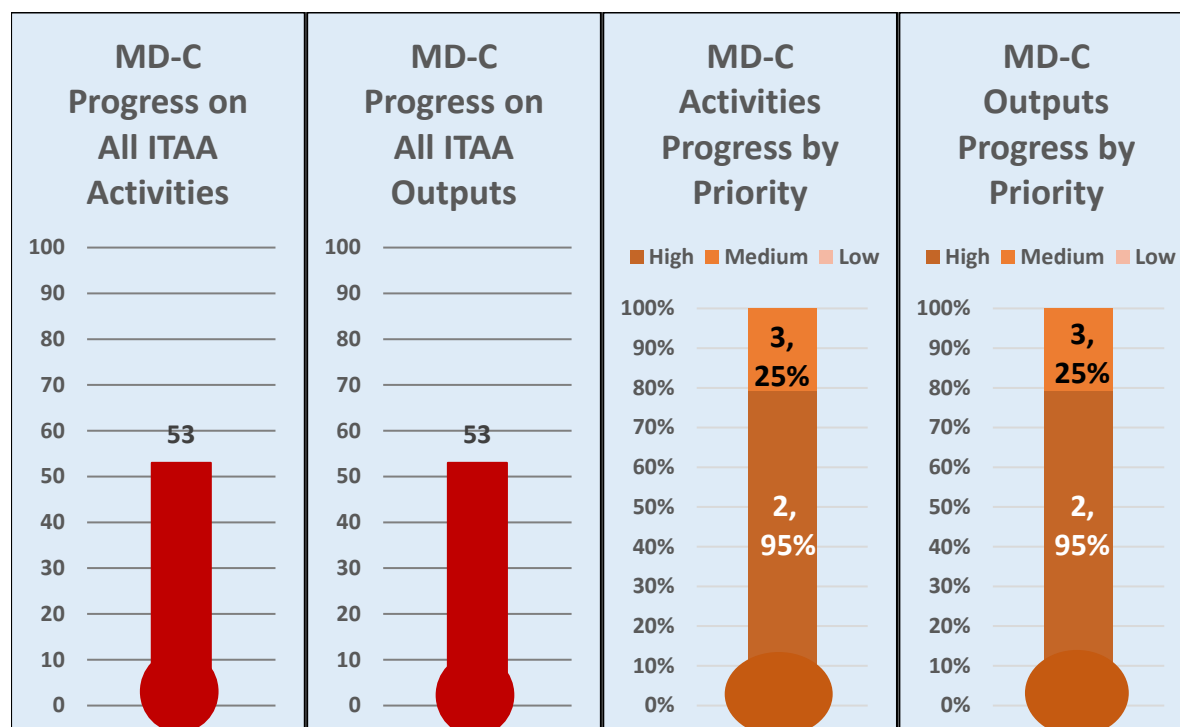
DORS is currently operating under an order of selection accepting only those with most significant disabilities. They are experiencing high turnover within the agency due to low wages and cannot hire to fill these vacancies due to a hiring freeze. Consolidated human resources further delays hiring efforts. Because of their own staffing issues, they rely heavily on CRPs, but with pandemic-related layoffs, there are not enough CRPs to serve clients; consequently, once a client starts receiving services from DORS, they face a secondary barrier of CRP waiting lists. All of these staffing challenges have resulted in unspent and relinquished funds. Even with all of these challenges, DORS is implementing some improvements. For instance, DORS is working on a data sharing agreement with MSDE to pull MSG data and have submitted an RFP to MSDE for a data system to enable a bi-directional data exchange. They are actively strengthening collaborative relationships with American Job Centers and multiple agencies serving transition-age youth. Even with the return to in-person services, DORS is identifying virtual practices to continue to implement to lighten case management activities.

## Plan for Improvement

The main area of TA requested by DORS is the examination and utilization of data related to program and performance outcomes. This includes the gathering and analysis of data related to consumer outcomes across a variety of areas through utilization of a data analysis tool developed by the VRTAC-QM. The analysis will include a review of outcomes achieved by CRPs

by service area in the state. DORS has identifies baseline and comparative data to determine if improvement plans are effective.

Since DORS engaged with VRTAC-QM, work has proceeded. The agency was monitored by RSA in the summer of 2022, requiring input from various agency staff who were also involved in technical assistance activities. The draft monitoring report has not yet been received by DORS.



### *NM-G: Year Two*

#### **Background**

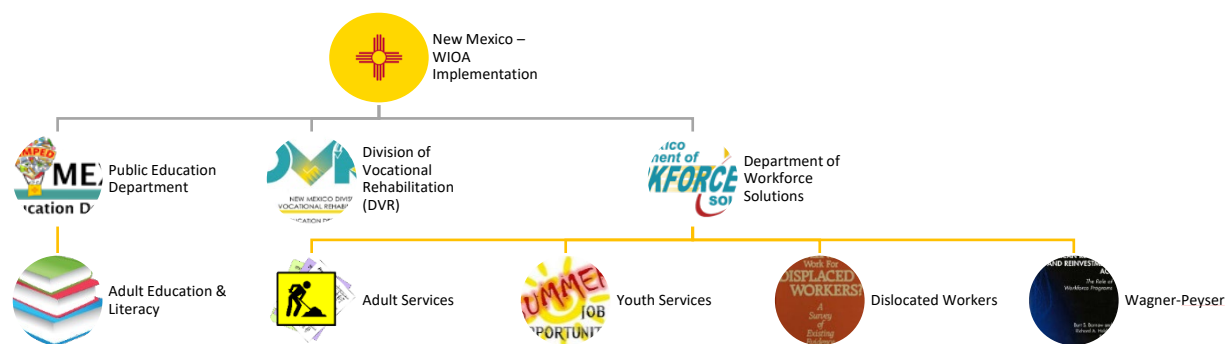
New Mexico’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is a general Vocational Rehabilitation agency housed within the New Mexico Public Education Department (PED). Currently, DVR has 20 local offices staffed with trained, professional Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. DVR also operates an administration office and a disability determination service center. Together, these offices serve all 33 of New Mexico’s counties. The Statewide Independent Living Council and State Rehabilitation Council are also attached to DVR.

Staffing is both DVR’s key strength and weakness. The agency has experienced several changes in leadership over the past ten years. In 2021, most of the leadership team was replaced by the governor, and a new director, Casey Stone-Romero, started in early 2022. The current leadership team is stable and strong. In recent history, DVR has also faced significant staff

turnover, a high volume of retirements, and issues with retention. As a result, in 2018, the agency had to enter OOS status, closing two priority categories (significantly disabled (SD) and non-significantly disabled) due to staffing vacancies. Closing these categories contributed to a 44% decline in the number of DVR participants from PY 17 to 19. While DVR has made great efforts to fill these vacancies, they face issues with training these new staff. The experience, knowledge, and dedication of DVR's current staff is its greatest asset and will be vital to overcoming these challenges.

The required five core programs under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) are housed within New Mexico's Department of Workforce Solutions, the Department of Education, and the office of the cabinet secretary. DVR's offices are co-located within Workforce Connection Centers (WCCs), designed to be one-stop workforce development hubs. Each hub includes a DVR agency, as well as agencies that represent Mexico's other core workforce development partners: Adult Dislocated Worker services, Adult Education and Family Literacy Programs, and Wagner-Peyser Employment Services.

**Figure 1: New Mexico WIOA Core Programs**



## Current Landscape

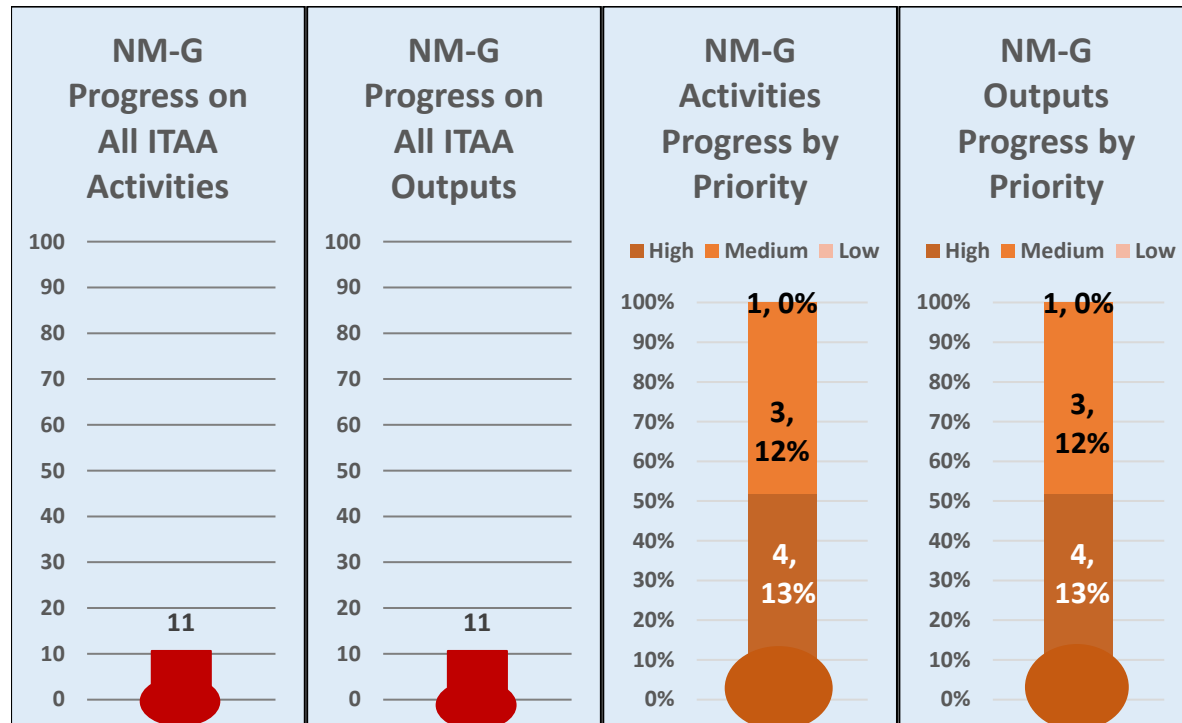
DVR requested technical assistance from VR-TAC-QM after receiving their RSA monitoring review and working through their corrective action plan (CAP). The agency has faced several challenges related to staffing. DVR has experienced significant staff vacancies and high staff turnover rates. The high number of vacancies has led to a lack of institutional knowledge and the inability to adequately meet the needs of participants. While the agency has attempted to fill these vacancies, the move to virtual training during the pandemic has posed significant challenges to ensuring that new staff are performing all aspects of the job correctly. The agency also experiences issues with finding qualified candidates and job retention. The high number of staff vacancies has led to their OOS status with only one priority category open. While they recently attempted to remove their OOS status, these attempts were unsuccessful due to the high volume of staff vacancies. Their OOS status has resulted in low participation numbers, but these numbers are currently on the rise, and they have successfully removed several hundred people from their OOS waiting list. DVR also lacks strong internal controls and written policies



and procedures. Despite these challenges, the staff that remains at the agency are knowledgeable, experienced, committed, and effective with technology. These strengths, however, appear to contradict reported challenges.

### Plan for Improvement

DVR is investing in their data infrastructure and attempting to become a more data-driven organization. They have seen a recent increase in participation and have improved the quality of their closures and Pre-ETS services. The agency has requested TA assistance in the following areas: counselor performance evaluations, MSG and CA tracking and reporting, data validation and quality assurance, internal controls, fiscal – MOE, 90-10 Rule justification and documentation, staff training, and policies and procedures review.



### SC-G: Year Two

#### Background

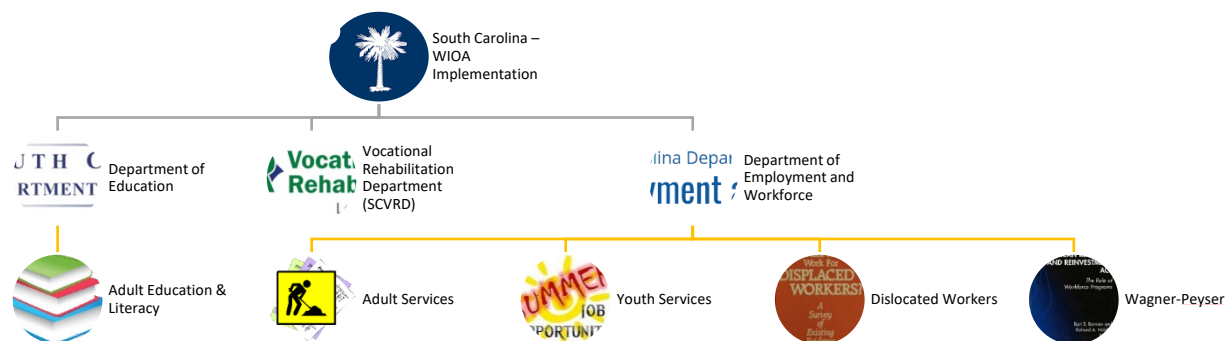
The South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD) is a general agency that is an independent agency of the South Carolina government, governed by a legislative oversight committee with one member from each congressional district. Members of this committee serve seven-year terms and are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the state senate.

The agency currently serves all 46 of South Carolina’s counties through 24 area offices, which are staffed with trained, professional Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. SCVRD also operates 24 work training centers (WTC) housed within each area office. These WTCs are designed to provide job training and work experiences to consumers. SCVRD also offers an array of expanded services and supports, including occupational therapy and physical therapy services, rehabilitation engineering, IT training centers, as well as residential alcohol and drug recovery treatment programs.

Although SCVRD has experienced several changes in leadership in recent history, the current leadership team is strong, knowledgeable, and dedicated to improving the agency. The most difficult challenge this team faces is ensuring that all policies and procedures are updated and adhere to federal guidelines. The agency is currently reviewing their policies and procedures and is working closely with VRTAC-QM during this process. SCVRD has also experienced a significant decline in applications within the past few years. Despite their need for updated policies and procedures and a decrease in applications, SCVRD operates its own community rehabilitation program (CRP) and case management system (CMS) that allows them to easily adjust these systems based on their current needs and changing labor market conditions. The agency is not in order of selection status, with all priority categories open.

Aside from SCVRD, most of the required core programs under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) are housed within the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce (SCDEW). The WIOA core programs under SCDEW include the Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs, and the Title III Wagner-Peyser Program. The South Carolina Department of Education oversees the Office of Adult Education. Like other states, SEVRD’s offices are co-located in one-stop centers with other WIOA and social service programs, such as TANF, SNAP, and veterans services.

**Figure 1: South Carolina WIOA Core Programs**

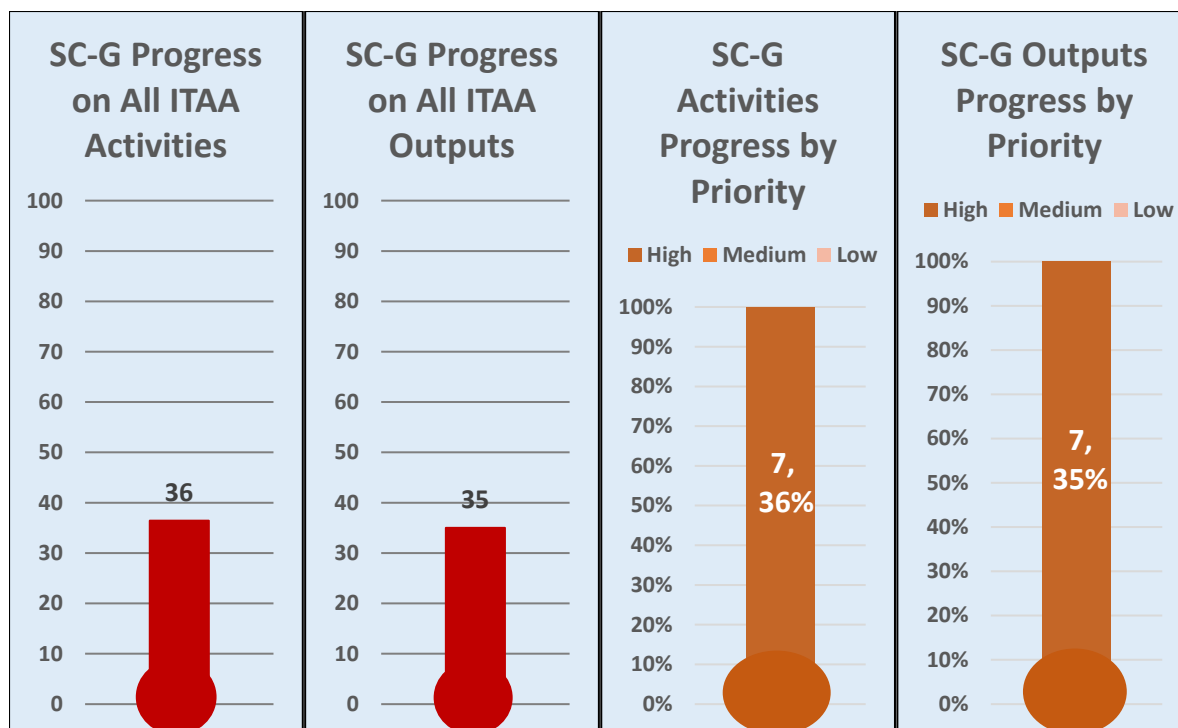


## **Current Landscape**

Preliminary findings from an RSA monitoring report prompted SCVRD to reach out to VRTAC-QM for Technical Assistance (TA). An Intensive Technical Assistance Agreement was signed with VRTAC-QM on May 9th, 2022. SCVRD faces several challenges that they are currently working to improve. For instance, while the agency has experienced declines in applications over the past few years, they have identified that these declines are partly the result of potentially eligible individuals not applying for VR services after receiving services from Pre-ETS. The agency is working to identify other areas that may contribute to this downward trend. SCVRD is also developing strategies to improve referral rates. During their monitoring visit, RSA also noted SCVRD's lack of updated policies and procedures and insufficient internal controls. While the agency had drafts of new policies and procedures, these were never finalized. SCVRD has made significant progress in ensuring these are updated and finalized. Other challenges that the agency faces include the need for improvements for their Job Readiness program, a young leadership team, service delivery challenges due to the rural composition of the state, and low participation numbers in their customized employment and self-employment programs. SCVRD has important strengths that will assist them in meeting these challenges, including agency-operated CRPs and case management systems, effective access and use of data, dedicated and fully engaged staff, and strong collaborations with community and educational partners.

## **Plan for Improvement**

SCVRD is making great strides to update its policies and procedures. The agency is also investigating declining application rates and is developing solutions to increase their numbers. SCVRD also requested technical assistance in the following areas: updating policies and procedures; assistance sustaining partnerships and leveraging resources related to strengthening customized employment and other services; assistance in strengthening customized training, self-employment, and supported and customized employment services; training on developing quality individualized plans for employment within established timeframes; review, development, and revision of internal controls and policy for case processing; data analysis and use of data for evidence-based decision-making; and policy and procedure development for performance accountability system and performance indicators.



## WA-B: Year Two

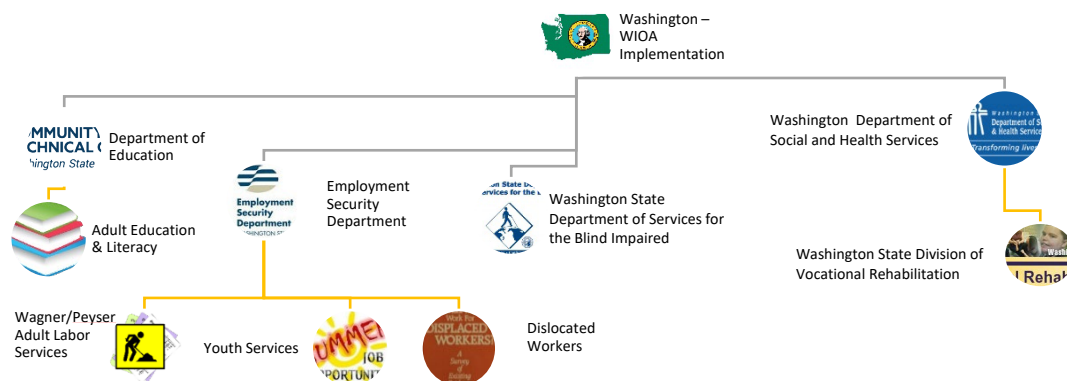
### Background

Washington State Department of Services for the Blind (DSB) provides services for people of all ages who are blind or have low vision in the state of Washington. DSB has a mission of inclusion, independence and economic vitality for people with visual disabilities. The agency provides services to more than 2,800 Washington State residents to help them gain or retain employment. The agency delivers services through a network of six offices including Vancouver, Lacey, Tacoma, Seattle, Yakima, and Spokane. The provision of these services occurs in-person in an individual's home community, and staff often travel to the participant. DSB provides an array of supports to individuals with visual disabilities including vocational rehabilitation services, youth services, independent living, and business engagement.

DSB serves as the designated state unit for serving people who are blind, low vision or deaf blind. DSB is one of the named partners under the four titles of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). DSB is actively involved in the development and revision of the Washington State WIOA Plan, and Workforce Development Strategic Plan. They have established partnerships with the twelve regional Workforce Development Councils across the state, One-stop WorkSource Centers, the Employment Security Department (Wagner-Peyser, Adult, Youth and Dislocated Worker programs), the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and

DSHS (TANF and BFET), the Community and Technical Colleges (Adult and Family Literacy) and the State Workforce and Education Board (see figure 1).

**Figure 1: Washington WIOA Core Programs**

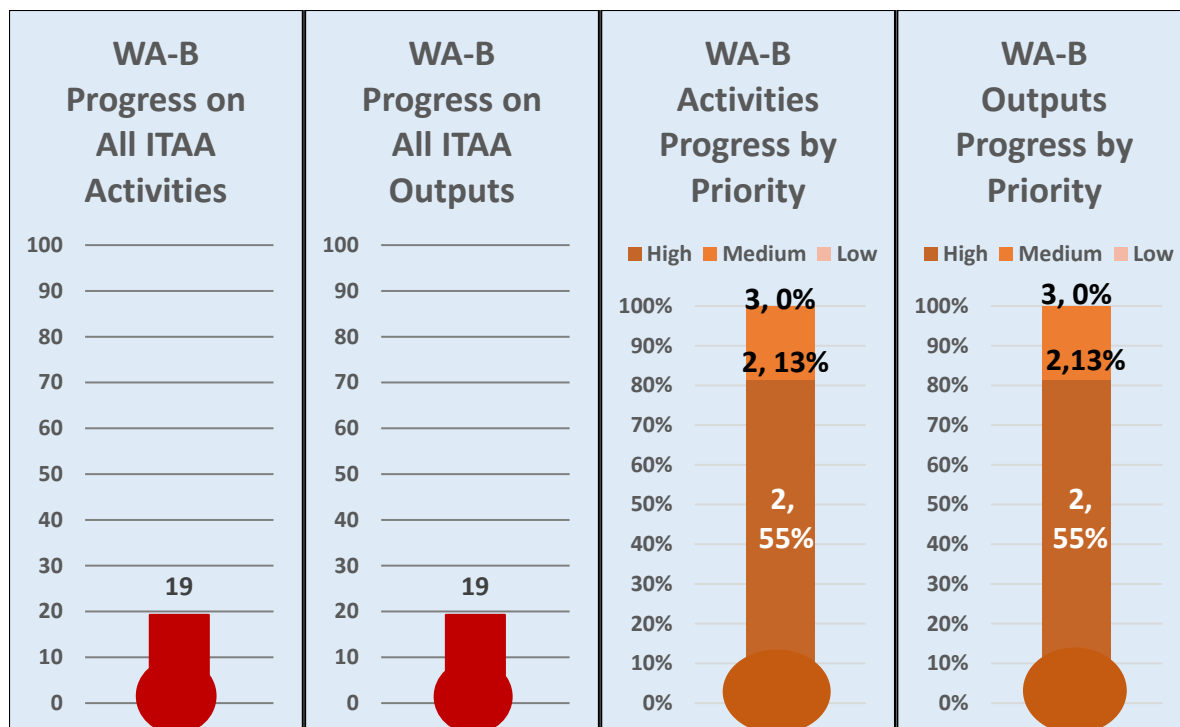


## Current Landscape

DSB received a monitoring report and findings from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in October of 2013. This report led to immediate action of DSB to address the use of funding for indirect costs as well as the provision of services for youth. As to be expected, the landscape of the system has significantly changed since this monitoring report in 2013. First, with the passage of WIOA in 2014, the references to timelines and delivery of youth services and subsequent expectations now need to reflect the new requirements of WIOA. Further, given the time lapse in between the monitoring and the involvement with the VR TAC-QM, the need for an in depth SWOT analysis is critical to evaluating the needs of the agency. While DSB currently operates within an order of selection, serving all three priority categories, the need for more current systems analysis was brought forward by the leadership of DSB.

## Plan for Improvement

As noted above, in August of 2021 DBS reached out to VRTAC-QM for TA and completed the SWOT process. This SWOT process uncovered potential opportunities in the areas of WIOA policy development and performance measure, staff development and leadership training. To address these areas of need DBS signed the ITAA with VRTAC-QM, and proceeded to include all of these elements in the ITAA, as well as elements specific to strategic planning and succession planning. The work with the VR TAC-QM will provide a strong foundation from DSB in preparing for future monitoring by RSA.



### WA-B: Year Two

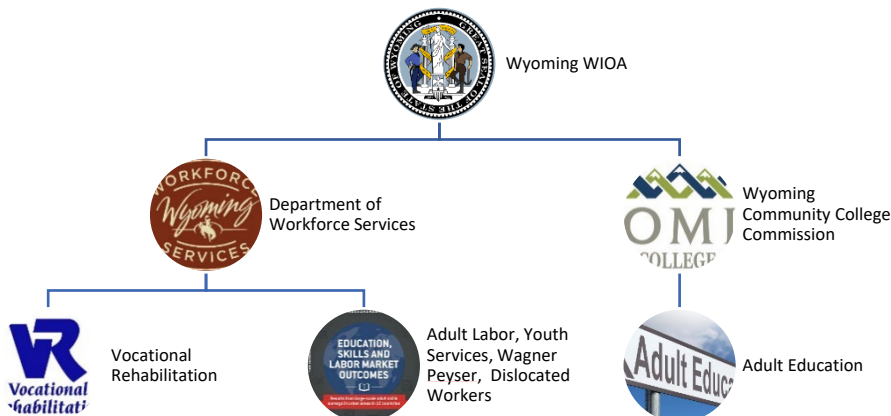
#### Background

The Wyoming Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (WDVR) is a combined vocational rehabilitation agency situated within the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services (DWS). Within the agency, there are two divisions, Vocational Rehabilitation General and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind. WDVR operates through a network of 16 field offices staffed with trained, professional Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors which serve Wyoming.

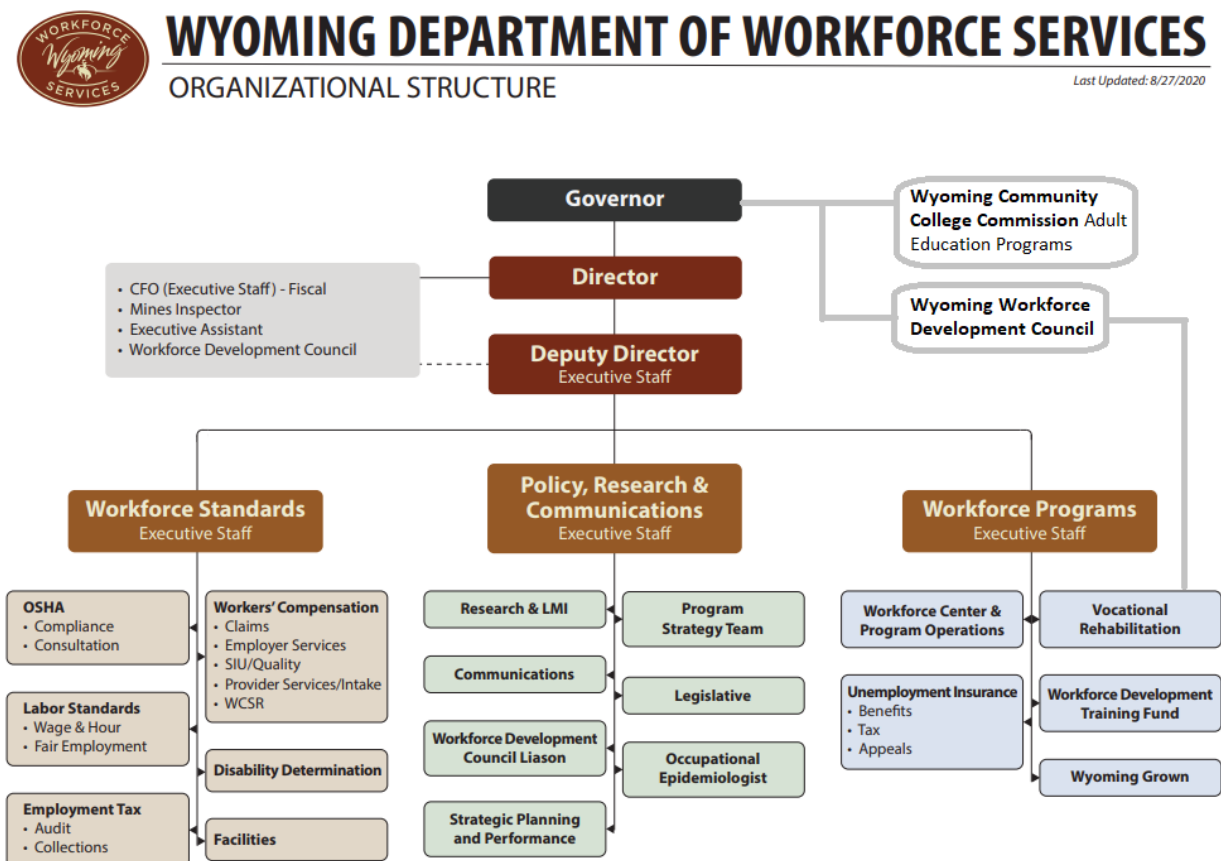
WDVR resides within the Department of Workforce Services, which is primarily focused on the programs and services through the Department of Labor (DOL). This has caused confusion for DSA staff as they apply DOL processes and standards to the U.S. Department of Education and Rehabilitation Services Administration regulatory requirements. They have a relatively new administrator, who replaced an administrator who had been with WDVR for more than 40 years. Additionally, the long-term WDVR fiscal staff retired after a long tenure with the agency. The new administrator has a strong counselor background but less experience with fiscal management. However, she has a strong desire to learn and understand, not just for herself, but for her core executive team.

The required five core programs under the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) are provided through DWS and the Wyoming Community College Commission, which has responsibility for Adult Education Programs (see Figure 1, and Figure 2), with coordination of individual services handled by One-Stop Centers across the state.

**Figure 1: Wyoming WIOA Core Programs**



**Figure 2: Wyoming DWS Organizational Structure**



## **Current Landscape**

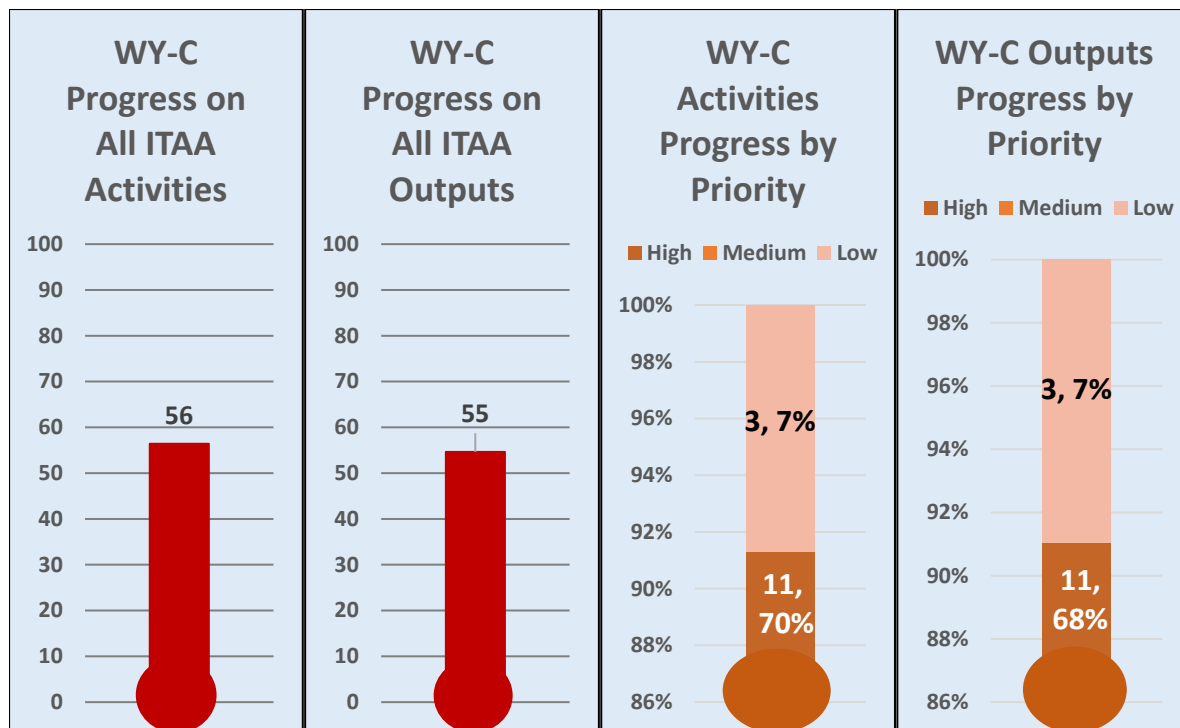
Wyoming is not currently using order of selection indicating they have sufficient resources to serve all individuals applying for services. In 2017, the WDVR program received their monitoring most recent report from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The monitoring report identified four areas for needed technical assistance. Those areas were 1) training on WIOA, 2) revision of the WDVf policy manual, 3) identification of contractors for a CSNA, and 4) case management systems. The next monitoring visit, scheduled to start in May, 2022, along with new leadership is what initiated the request for technical assistance from VRTAC-QM. WDVR has a strong leadership, both at the executive and regional management levels. Most recently they completed a fee schedule and manual for CRPs. The size of the agency is small, but it works to their benefit in areas of communication, common expectations, dedication, training, and change. But, being small has its drawbacks as they have limited bandwidth to address all issues. They also have numerous fiscal challenges from spending the 15% pre-employment transition services funds to not fully understanding the fiscal requirements or even being able to see the state budget for the unit much less control it. Lastly, the DSA is incorrectly applying Department of Labor Processes to the VR grant.

## **Plan for Improvement**

The WDVR proactively reached out for support prior to RSA's May 2022 monitoring visit. Through the SWOT analysis, WDVR and VRTAC-QM identified fiscal training, policy, procedure, and reporting activities needed to start addressing issues. The Intensive Technical Assistance Agreement (ITAA) was signed in December, 2021 and work started in January, 2022. Areas addressed in the ITAA focus heavily on the areas outlined in the SWOT analysis. This planned work will guide activities and be reviewed once the RSA monitoring report is received.

Since the work began in January, 2022, there have been staffing changes in the fiscal group supporting WDVR. That unit has now stabilized, and the work has resumed.



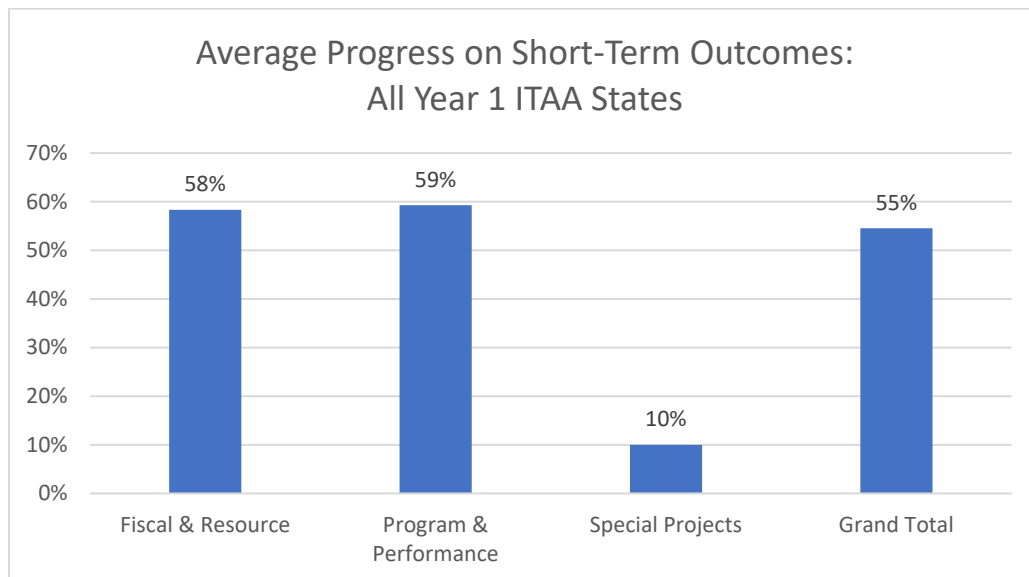


### C. ITAA Outcomes: Workplans, State Narratives, and Data Dashboards

Outcomes for Intensive TA can be examined in multiple ways: (1) TA Team members recording TA in the TA Tracker record notable outcomes and their completion status directly into tracker fields. Those outcomes are reported above with the rest of the data from the TA Tracker where they can be directly contrasted with completion of comparable outcomes as they occur under Universal or Targeted TA auspices. (2) ITAAs also directly articulate expected and agreed upon outcomes as they are chosen from specific topic area logic models to be applicable to the work by the mutual agreement of the TA Team and SVRA. In this section, we report the average progress towards those articulated outcomes for the 4 Year One ITAAs since at least one full year of Intensive TA has been provided (indeed 15-18 months). Short-Term Outcomes are expected to be achieved in a 1-3 year timeframe, so this assessment is still a preliminary one, but as can be seen from the charts below, average progress by SVRA and topic area is impressive. (3) A third way to examine outcomes is still a tenuous one at this early juncture, but worth beginning to review, and that is the metrics associated with Common Performance Measures specifically articulated in two of the GPRA measures for VRTAC-QM: employment and measurable skills gains. (4) Finally, qualitative data from two sources provides additional information regarding outcomes and impacts taking place: (a) the Evaluation Team conducts annual interviews of ITAA recipients and understands from them the impacts they are beginning to see and (b) the TA Team writes narratives for each ITAA and articulates the progress, outcomes, and impacts they see taking place.

(1) ITAA Articulated Outcomes: Progress on outcomes for Year One ITAA states is taking place as seen in summary metrics and charts. These outcomes include improved knowledge (capacity), as well as specifically targeted improvements in the areas of fiscal management such as maximizing drawdown of their Federal share and in VR Program Regulations and WIOA Performance Measures such as timely,

accurate, and complete performance reporting/RSA-911 reporting and improved time to eligibility or IPE development.



SVRA	Fiscal & Resource	Program & Performance	Special Projects	All Average
DE-B	83%			83%
KS-C		42%		42%
MT-C		63%	10%	45%
PA-C	10%	83%		58%
All SVRAs	58%	59%	10%	55%

(2) TA Team Narratives: The TA Team members have directly reflected on these outcomes and the impacts they are seeing in their “State Narratives” that they composed for the first time for the Year 2 Annual Program Report and which they will continue to update for the remainder of the project. Those narratives were coded by the Evaluation Team for common themes or “buckets” in which outcomes and impacts are being seen.

*CAPs and Special Conditions:* For one-half of the ITAA states, the TA Team noted working on the CAP in a direct way (this may not represent the number of states working on CAPs, but rather those for whom the work was notable in some way). In five of the SVRAs, resolution (or significant action towards resolution) of RSA “conditions” was identified, including one SVRA that was able to entirely resolve their CAP and eliminate their special conditions.

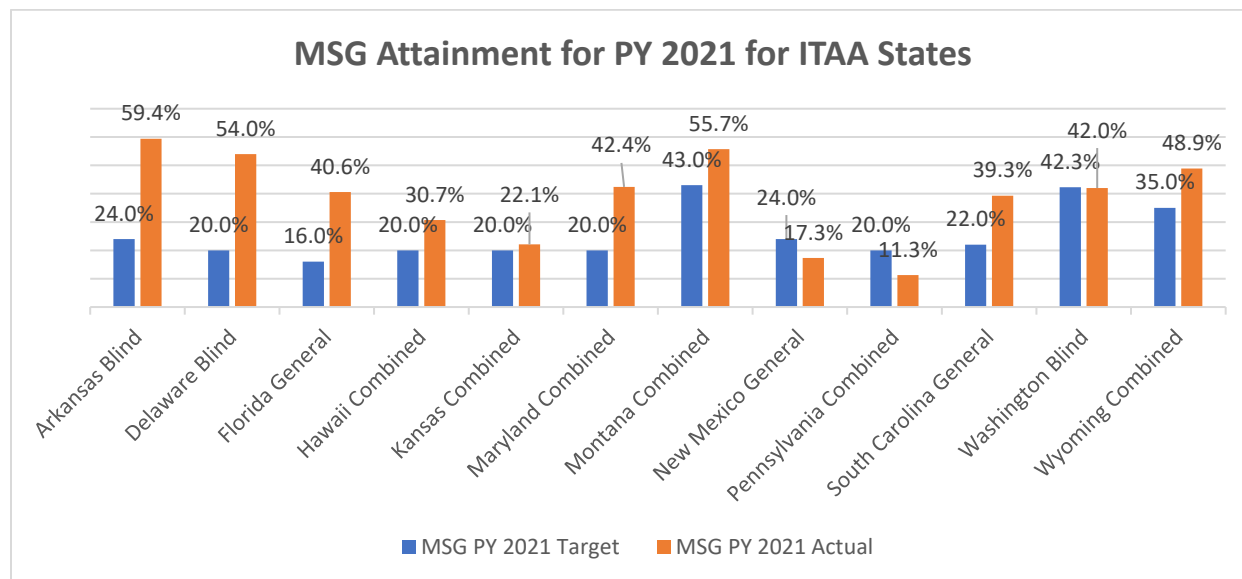
*Staff Capacity:* For most, improved knowledge as a result of direct trainings were also articulated (again, all ITAA states are receiving training and improving their understanding of fiscal or program subject matter would be a direct first step, but not all narratives directly called out this outcome). In four of the states, it was pointed out that staff capacity had increased not just in

knowledge, but directly through the hire of new staff in a way that directly addresses a significant challenge to the agency meeting its fiscal and program management requirements effectively (in one agency, HI-C, fiscal work has been on hold due to lack of staff). In one narrative, staff capacity was also noted as improved in terms of explicit staff roles and accountability for fiscal management of the grant having been established. Staff capacity is an ongoing issue for many SVRAs (interviews with SVRA leadership across the country – and objective data – both reflect the significant ongoing challenges to effective program management posed by rampantly high levels of turnover at agencies).

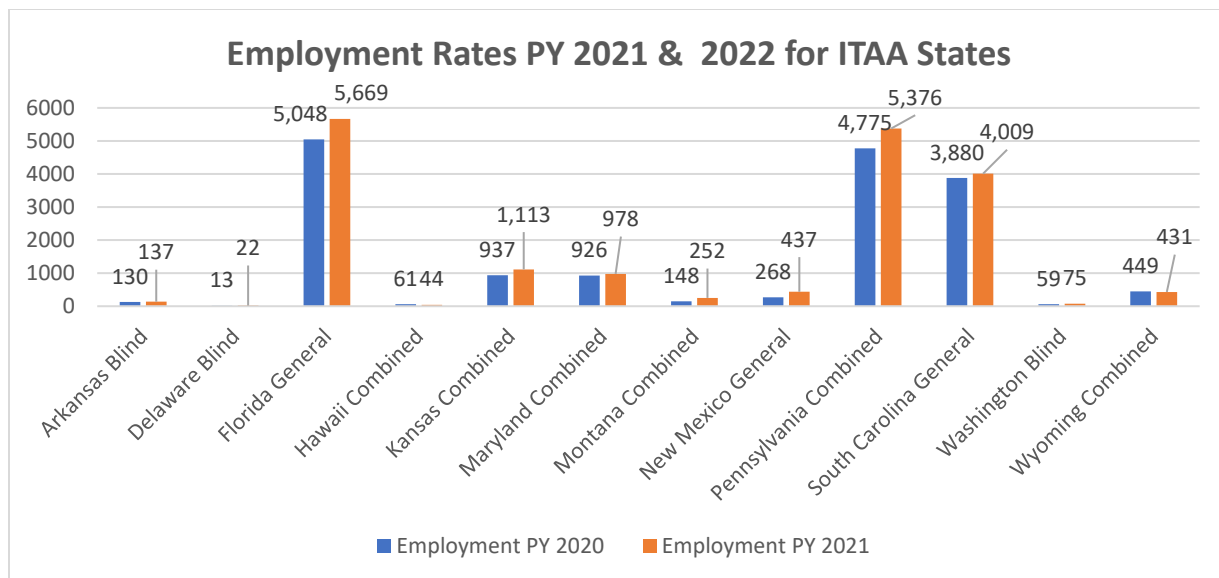
*Collaboration:* Within an agency, collaboration through the dissolution of silos, improvement of culture, and staff hires that bridge units was another highlight of capacity and performance improving in four SVRAs. Relevant to both GPRA measures, WIOA expectations, and general best practice, collaboration was also found to be improved between four SVRAs and other agencies or units in State Government (e.g., through DSA-DSU units forming core teams and improvements between SVRAs and State Education Departments with regards to Pre-ETS and the tracking and reporting of student data).

*Documentation of Fiscal, Program, and Performance Management:* In creating an approach to fiscal, program, and performance management that can survive beyond changes in staff or leadership, a key aspect of intensive work has been to create, revise, and update written policies, procedures, internal controls, and ways to manage contracts with providers. At least nine direct instances were articulated across the 12 state narratives.

**(3) RSA-911 Data:** From RSA Data Dashboards using agency-submitted RSA-911 data, there are 10 states of the 12 ITAA states that met or exceeded their MSG targets for Program Year 2021 (Washington Blind was 0.3% away from their exact cutoff and is considered a “met” target):



The number is the same for employment rates, with 10 of the 12 ITAA states improving their employment rates (the two that did not were different from the two not meeting MSG targets and were very close to matching their prior year’s rate):



As noted in the GPRA submission, these outcomes in employment represent an 11.1% increase in clients in employment translating to a raw increase of 2,665 clients finding employment!

#### **D. ITAA Outcomes: SVRAs' Reflections on Intensive TA Provided by QM**

Question: Do you feel there are fiscal, programmatic, or management issues that are common among VR agencies around the country?

- Everyone seems to be struggling with expending the grant.
- Having Fiscal under DSA-multiple agencies going through this.
- There are many common fiscal issues that a number of states are struggling with. States often compare notes on these issues.
- RSA should develop templates that agencies can follow for compliance. An example would be a template for period of performance or types of internal controls.
- TACs are necessary to translate RSA guidance, which can often be very broad and SVRAs need support customizing to their context.

Question: What do you hope will be the ultimate impact of your engagement with the VRTAC-QM?

- Expertise and wisdom.
- Knowing what is going right and knowing where are the gaps.
- Lessen the dependence on VRTAC-QM.
- Staff understand policy.
- Education of staff.
- Separate policy from procedure.
- Integrity of programs.
- Conforming to federal regulations.
- Understanding how to use data more effectively.
- RSA guidance is too broad. TACs fill in a lot of detail of the how and the why
- Get on the same page with WIOA regulations.

- Avoid being out of compliance
- Build knowledge base
- Staff understand the changes that are coming including the how, the why and the when.

Question: What do you feel are barriers to sustaining quality management practices your are developing in your agency?

- Learning fiscal policies and procedures is like 'drinking through a fire hose'
- Having the Fiscal section under the DSA. DSA does not understand RSA requirements.
- Staffing capacity-too few staff to do all the work that is needed. Especially in smaller agencies.
- Understanding Post-Employment policy and procedures.
- Turnover of key staff including administrative staff who write policy.
- RSA guidance has been minimal.
- Turnover-having experienced staff.

Question: Have you engaged other Technical Assistance Centers?

- Yes, both NTACT: C and VRTAC-QE
- VRTAC-QE for Supported and Customized Employment. We need information because we want to do it right.
- Not using other CoPs
- Using the major TACs mostly for policy development

Question: How would you define Quality Management?

- Innovative Leadership.
- Doing the best possible job for clients.
- Helping staff understand the "why."
- Following federal regulations.
- Well- run programs.
- Efficient use of resources.
- Meeting RSA requirements.
- Taking a hard look at what you are doing.
- Improving and streamlining processes.

Questions Is your agency involved in national Community (ies) of Practice?

- Supported Employment
- Monitoring CoP
- The Fiscal Forum

## **E. Reflections and Recommendations**

At the end of year 2, over 50 % of all activities and outputs have been completed. This is an indication of the sustained activity levels of TA with SVRAs. There appears to be very little lag or delay in progress in key activities. This translates to VRTAC-QM being very active in all ITAA states and SVRAs devoting necessary resources to sustain ongoing activities, progressing toward completion.

Only 17% of all activities have not started. This is an indication that the ITAA activities that have been developed are realistic and achievable. It is also an indication of the sustained effort by TAC and SVRA staff. Even for Year 2 ITAA SVRAs, progress on activities and outputs are high. This is an indication of VRTAC-QM and SVRA hitting the ground running and making progress. Again, this is an indication of early and sustained effort of both parties and the focus and clarity of the ITAAs.

# **Special Projects & TAC Collaborative**

## VI. SPECIAL PROJECTS

VRTAC-QM special projects were created to bring innovative practices to SVRAs on pilot basis. Due to the structure of these projects, both summative and formative evaluations will be key to communicating their effectiveness, replicability, and sustainability. For the Year One Evaluation report, progress on logic models to establish expectations for the structure of the projects and the outputs and outcomes to be tracked and evaluated were in progress. Further updates for Year Two are below.

### A. SARA

During the first two quarters of Year Two, this special project shifted focus to working with SVRAs in implementing full-scale versions of the SARA platform targeted to address specific quality management needs, instead of just targeting Ticket-to-Work (TTW) reimbursements. RSA has approved of this change in focus.

**Status:** A prior logic model was established for the TTW-focused implementation of SARA. In Year Three, evaluators will work with the SARA TA Team to revise the logic model to align with its new focus. A prior logic model from the WINTAC will be useful in this process, as will the identification of SVRAs to participate in this process as customized logic models may be ideal to accommodate disparate implementation goals.

### B. Community Partnerships

This category of pilot projects will bring together representatives from VR, Workforce, Education, Medicaid, Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health, Advocacy organizations and Independent Living with the goal of aligning and integrating services, leveraging, and maximizing resources and planning to develop a cross-entity system that maximizes employment opportunities for individuals with the most significant disabilities. The focus is on identifying essential services and supports, resource mapping to target service gaps and provide seamless, whole-person targeted services. Three distinct “pilot projects” or foci of work have been defined: (1) Employment First Systems Change, (2) Customized Employment (systems and management oriented), and (3) Integrated Resource Teams.

**Status:** Community Partnerships is written into the ITAA for MT-G as a low priority. There has been general discussion but no tangible activity to date.

With respect to the Customized Employment work under Community Partnerships Special Project, targeted TA with MI-B and MI-G in partnership on Customized Employment has been ongoing. Meetings include the program evaluation team of the VRTAC-QM to focus on management of the CE program and ongoing quality assurance and program evaluation planning by MI to inform and support their sustainability work. The evaluation team provided them with a dashboard template to support continued tracking of capacity-building and client progress to outcomes as they began under the WINTAC pilot phase. The dashboard was further updated to include critical metrics on capacity match or mismatch based on accruing referrals and time spent on service provision.

With respect to Integrated Resource Teams work under the Community Partnerships Special Project, a logic model was drafted in the first quarter of Year Two and is under review by colleagues at NTACT:C, with whom this work is collaborative in nature.



With respect to Employment First Systems Change work under the Community Partnerships Special Project, in the second quarter of Year Two VRTAC-QM partnered with subject matter Dr. David Mank to construct a conceptual framework/roadmap for establishing Employment First Entities in states. VRTAC-QM will use this framework to formalize implementation of this special project in SVRAs. In addition, VRTAC-QM is cataloguing all states with state legislative/executive mandates to implement Employment First entities. VRTAC-QM will interview VR agencies in these states to evaluate the impact of these entities on VR services, specifically, services to individuals with the most significant disabilities. VRTAC-QM will disseminate the results of this work and present at upcoming CSAVR conferences.

As part of the research, VRTAC-QM will look at key outcomes of states with formal Employment First policy/legislation to analyze any differences in Common Performance Measures contrasted with states without formal Employment First policies.

### **C. Community Reinvestment Act**

This special project was designed to utilize funds donated by major banks from their Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) commitments as match for the VR program. These funds can be used to develop projects that promote financial empowerment, independence, and self-sufficiency for low to moderate income individuals with disabilities. In Year One, evaluators worked with the TA Team to begin structuring a logic model for this area, with the goal of completing it with updated, specific language as details emerged in planning between SVRAs and the TA Team implementing this work.

**Status:** VRTAC-QM continues to work closely with RSA and banking regulators in ensuring that this special project follows all relevant federal regulations regarding the acquisition and utilization and sustainability of these non-federal funds. In the meantime, work has continued in identifying potential agencies. The logic model completion remains pending until next steps in planning are progressed. Once implementation is underway, evaluators will review the CRA pilot projects being implemented by Workforce Agencies as pilot projects to determine if there are common outputs and outcomes aligned to common goals that may be valuable to consider.

### **D. Recruitment and Retention**

In response to the current crisis in staff attrition and recruitment of new staff in many State VR agencies, the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM) launched a pilot project to assist up to 4 agencies in developing customized strategies to address these issues in their organizations. The four agencies that requested to be part of this pilot project are AR-B, CT-G, IA-G, and OK-C.

The VRTAC-QM Evaluation Team has had preliminary discussions with staff involved in the design and implementation of this project. Evaluation Scheduled- Year 3 Quarter 4

### **E. Summary and Analysis of Special Projects' Progress**

All three special projects have met with some headwinds in gaining a foothold in SVRAs. Two related fiscal trends from the past year and a half may provide some context:

1. SVRAs may be in less need of additional financial resources. The design of the Special Projects occurred prior to the pandemic when SVRAs were in need of resources to meet federal match requirements and improve overall agency performance. Since the pandemic, data demonstrates

an ongoing and accelerated shift in the downward trend of number of consumers being served. SVRAs have struggled to spend their allotment and are not generally seeking the additional revenue that would have been an outcome of the CRA and SARA Special Projects. It is for this reason that they are being redesigned to address other, higher priority program management needs. The Community Partnerships work, although also an avenue to recognize cost-savings through comparable benefits or braided funding, enhances services and outcomes for diverse clients and clients with the most significant disabilities and as such, has been less affected by fiscal trends of late. Work in those areas has progressed further as a result.

2. With record levels of returned funds from SVRAs, RSA has re-engaged its own funding stream for 'special projects' through its innovation grants twice in the past two years. This year focuses on the topic of "Sub-minimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment" (SWTCIE) grants that were designed to include community partners into the innovation proposals. These grants are funded at significant levels by RSA and many SVRAs are known to be exploring the possibility of competing for them. VRTAC-QM will reach out to states who apply but do not get these grants to determine continued interest in adopting Employment First approaches to achieve the same goals sought under the SWTCIE grants.

## VII. Coordination and Collaborative

The VRTAC-QM engages in collaborative Training and TA with all other TACs, though thus far the bulk of overlapping work is with that done by the NTACT-C and the VRTAC-QE. The VRTAC-QM initiated and leads a group of all TACs, the TAC Collaborative, bringing them together to share information about each Center's work with state agencies and to identify points of connection, referral, and discuss the best ways to support agencies without adding administrative burden (e.g., as could occur through duplicative or overlapping assessments). In addition to explicitly joint ITAAs, the National Needs Assessment was led by the VRTAC-QM which distributed the survey and provided a survey report back to the other TACs. In addition, as described above, joint trainings also take place with other TACs. For the first year of the TACC (although it existed in previous iterations of the TACs) the focus has been sharing information of activities and collaboration. Additionally, there has been a concentration on ensuring the NCTRM collects and disseminates relevant information from the TACs.

Some initial efforts have begun around joint technical assistance center work around evaluation. These efforts will likely expand in the proceeding years.

### A. Reflections and Recommendations

As SVRAs are confirmed for special project pilots, formative evaluation will focus on collecting benchmark data related to identified outcomes. Summative evaluations will focus on capacity building and the sustainability of the special projects and will include qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis.

With respect to the Collaborative, future areas of emphasis for joint evaluation could include:

1. The impact on SVRAs on Intensive TA with multiple TACs including sequencing of activities. The impact could be measured in part by outcome data as well as qualitative data resulting from interviews with agency key informants.
2. Tracking the growth in referrals among TACs