

INFORMATION BRIEF #3

ESSENTIAL SELF-EMPLOYMENT TRAINING TOPICS AS REPORTED BY VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROFESSIONALS

This brief provides information from a national needs assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) professionals who were recruited with the assistance of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). Participants were asked their opinions on the critical components of self-employment training for VR personnel. They also were asked about their personal training needs, their demographics, and agency characteristics. This brief focuses on the participants' perceptions of self-employment training needs for VR personnel as well as their personal and agency characteristics.

WHO PARTICIPATED IN NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

Two hundred and sixty-four VR counselors and agency personnel from 29 states participated in the online needs assessment. While the sample size was small, the results provide insight as to what State VR Agency professionals report as their training needs. The following table provides an overview of the respondents' demographics.

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TABLE 1*Needs Assessment Participant Demographics*

What Is Your Job Title?	
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor	61.5% (n=161)
Program Manager	6.9% (n=18)
VR State Agency Director	0.4% (n=1)
Training Coordinator	1.5% (n=4)
VR Services Coordinator for Self-Employment	0.8% (n=2)
Other VR Professionals	29.0% (n=76)
Where Are You Employed?	
State General VR Agency	87.8% (n=231)
State Blind Agency	10.3% (n=27)
Other	1.9% (n=5)
Education	
Associate Degree	3.5% (n=9)
Bachelor's Degree	12.4% (n=32)
Master's Degree	81.1% (n=210)
Doctorate (e.g., Ph.D., Ed.D.)	1.2% (n=3)
Other	1.9% (n=5)

WHAT STATES WERE REPRESENTED IN NEEDS ASSESSMENT?

The VR professionals who participated in the needs assessment were located in 29 states as listed in Table 2. The highest percentage of participants reported that they provided services in a rural geographic region (45.2%, n =119). When asked if their state agency has a staff person assigned to provide training and technical assistance on self-employment, 22.1% of the participants (n=58) replied yes. However, a larger percentage 55.9% (n=147), replied that they had someone in their agency that could help them with self-employment. Approximately 78% (n=202) of the participants reported that their VR agency has polices that support self-employment and business ownership. The following table presents this information.

TABLE 2

Agency Characteristics

States Represented (n=29)		
Alabama	Iowa	North Dakota
Arizona	Kansas	Oklahoma
Arkansas	Kentucky	Oregon
Colorado	Maryland	South Carolina
Delaware	Massachusetts	Tennessee
Florida	Minnesota	Virginia
Georgia	Missouri	Washington
Hawaii	Montana	West Virginia
Illinois	New Mexico	Wisconsin
Indiana	North Carolina	
Geographic Region		
Rural	45.2% (n=119)	

Geographic Region		
Suburban	35.7% (n=94)	
Urban	19.0% (n=50)	
Does your state agency have a staff person assigned to provide training and technical assistance on self-employment?		
Yes: 22.1% (n=58)	No: 41.1% (n=180)	Don't know: 36.9% (n=97)
Is there someone in your office/agency who can help you with self-employment?		
Yes: 55.9% (n=147)	No: 18.3% (n=48)	No: 18.3% (n=48)
Does your VR agency have policies that support self-employment and business ownership?		
Yes: 77.7% (n=202)	No: 3.8% (n=10)	Don't know: 18.8% (n=49)

WHAT DID VR PROFESSIONALS REPORT AS THEIR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE WITH SELF-EMPLOYMENT?

When asked to describe their knowledge of self-employment, responses ranged from no knowledge to a great deal of knowledge. Approximately 41% (n=106) of the participants indicated that they had very little knowledge of self-employment. Less than 5% (12) responded that they had a great deal of knowledge. Figure 1 presents the responses to the following statement: Please rate your knowledge of self-employment for individuals with disabilities.

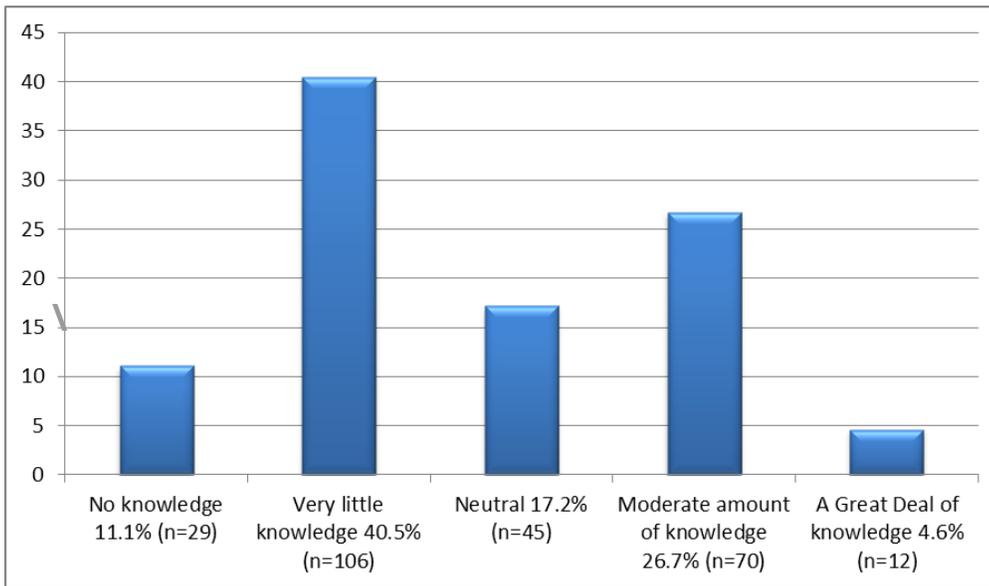


Figure 1: *Knowledge of Self-Employment*

Participants were asked about their experience with self-employment. The largest percentage of respondents (42%, n=110) reported that they had very little experience with self-employment. Approximately 20% (n=52) stated that they had no experience. Figure 2 presents the responses to the following question: Which one of the following best describes your experience with self-employment for individuals with disabilities?

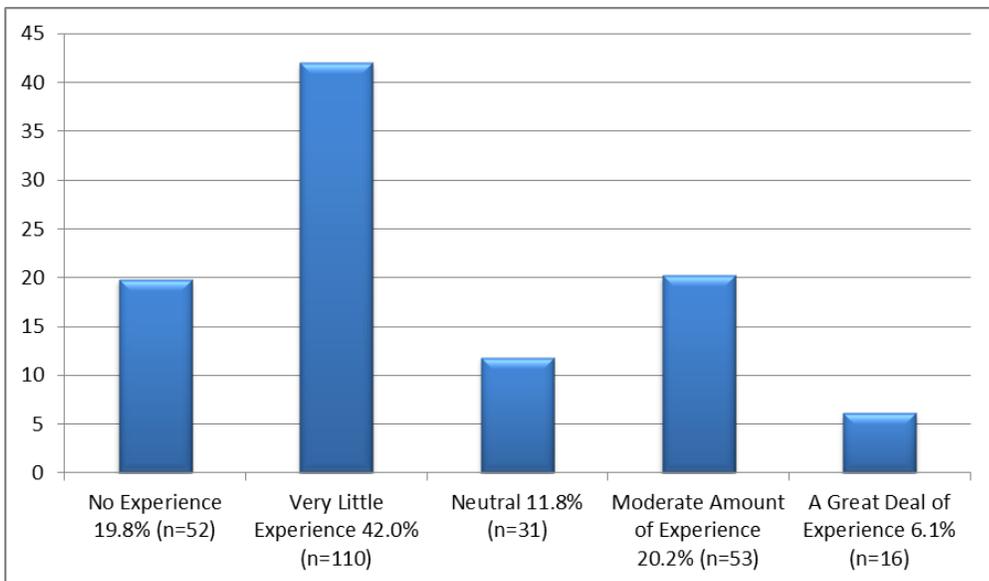


Figure 2: *Experience with Self-Employment*

HOW DID THE VR PROFESSIONALS RATE THEIR CAPACITY AND THEIR AGENCY'S CAPACITY TO PROVIDE SELF-EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS?

Figure 3 presents the responses to: How would you rate your personal capacity to support individuals with disabilities in achieving their self-employment goals? Few participants (2.7%, n=7) rated their ability to assist clients with their self-employment goals as excellent. Approximately 15% rated their ability as very good (n=38); 22.6% (n=59) rated their ability as good. The highest percentage ranked their ability as fair (34.1%, n=89).

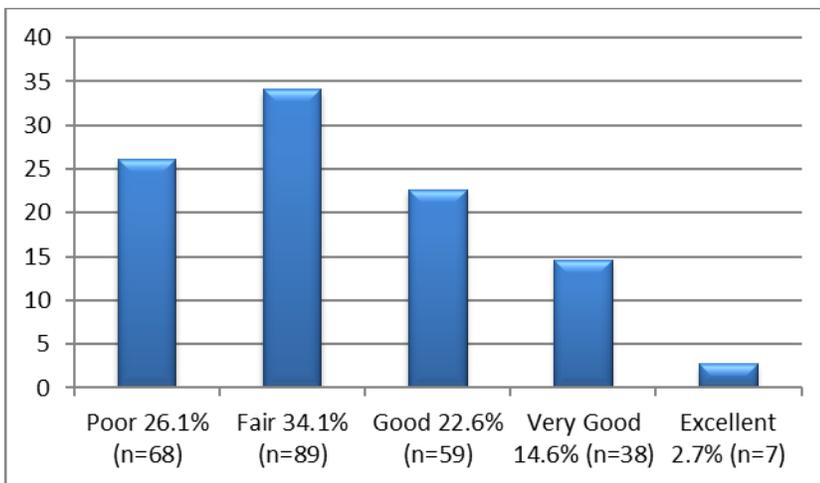


Figure 3: *Personal Capacity to Provide Self-employment supports*

Figure 4 presents the responses to: How would you rate your VR agency's capacity to support individuals with disabilities in achieving their self-employment goals? Few participants (3.4%, n=9) rated their agency's ability to support clients with their self-employment goals as excellent. Approximately 10% rated their ability agency's as very good (n=27); 30.3% (n=79) rated their agency's ability as good. The highest percentage ranked their ability as fair (37.9%, n=99).

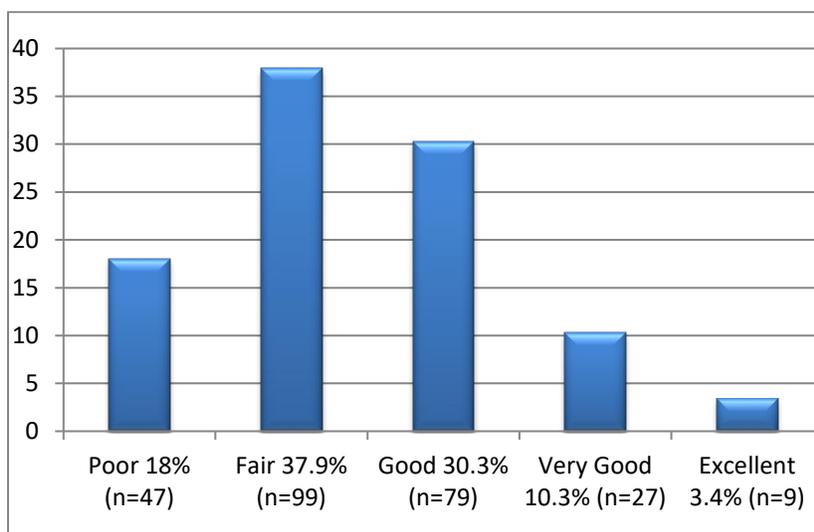


Figure 4: Agency Capacity to Provide Agency Capacity to Support Self-employment Goals

WHAT DID PARTICIPANTS REPORT AS ESSENTIAL SELF-EMPLOYMENT TRAINING TOPICS?

Table 3 summarizes the data on the importance of training topics for VR professionals. The items in the table are presented in the order that they appeared in the needs assessment. Items by topics were randomized in order to not lead the respondents towards specific answers. In reviewing the table, it is noted that the majority of the participants felt that the topics were important or absolutely essential for training on self-employment. Very few participants identified any of the topics as not at all or of very little importance.

Slightly more respondents were neutral on other items such as: 1) Working with a VR client that has not developed their business concept, 61 (23.1%); 2) Developing Marketing Plans, 59 (22.3%), 3) Developing and facilitating teams to support self-employment, 59 (22.3%); 4) Reviewing and evaluating business financials, 53 (20.1%); and 5) Assisting the VR client in developing a business plan, 51 (19.3%). These items may be considered tasks/activities that a VR professional may fund for the VR client rather than complete them with the participant themselves. However, this may or may not be the case, since no questions on the needs assessment asked respondents to identify

services and supports that VR professionals identified as their responsibility versus assisting the client by funding these supports.

TABLE 3

How critical do you think training on this topic is for VR counselors and staff?

Topics	Not at all	Little Importance	Neutral	Important	Absolutely Essential
Self-employment state policies	1 (0.4%)	12 (4.5%)	23 (8.7%)	138 (52.3%)	90 (34.1%)
Providing guidance and counseling on self-employment policy and practices to VR clients.	2 (1.1%)	7 (2.7%)	18 (6.8%)	145 (54.9%)	91 (34.5%)
Discussing the opportunities and challenges of self-employment with VR clients.	1 (0.4%)	4 (1.5%)	16 (6.1%)	134 (50.8%)	109 (41.3%)
Developing an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for self-employment.	3 (1.1%)	9 (3.4%)	27 (10.2%)	123 (46.6%)	102 (38.6%)
Developing and facilitating teams to support self-employment.	4 (1.5%)	13 (4.9%)	59 (22.3%)	120 (45.5%)	68 (25.8%)
Assisting the VR client in developing a business plan.	9 (3.4%)	12 (4.5%)	51 (19.3%)	109 (41.3%)	83 (31.4%)
Understanding business structures (sole-proprietorships, partnerships, LLCs, corporations, nonprofits).	4 (1.5%)	18 (6.8 %)	37 (14.0%)	127 (48.1%)	78 (29.5%)
Impact of business structure on public benefits.	4 (1.5%)	14 (5.3%)	38 (14.4%)	117 (44.3%)	91 (34.5%)

Topics	Not at all	Little Importance	Neutral	Important	Absolutely Essential
Impact of self-employment income and assets on public benefits, including use of work incentives (e.g., Property Essential to Self-Support, 1619b, Medicaid Buy-In).	2 (0.8%)	15(5.7%)	26 (9.8%)	133 (50.4%)	88 (33.3%)
Essential to Self-Support, 1619b, Medicaid Buy-In).					
Working with a VR client that has not developed their business concept (e.g., products or services).	7 (2.7%)	15 (5.7%)	61 (23.1%)	117 (44.3%)	64 (24.2%)
Working with a VR client whose business concept does not appear to be feasible.	8 (3.0%)	10 (3.8%)	38 (14.4%)	121 (45.8%)	87 (33.0%)
Working with a VR client who has no experience with self-employment.	7 (2.7%)	9 (3.4%)	47 (17.8%)	115 (43.6%)	86 (32.6%)
Working with a client who appears to need significant or ongoing support operating a business (e.g. supported self-employment.)	7 (2.7%)	9 (3.4%)	43 (16.3%)	134 (50.8%)	71 (26.9%)
Aligning the VR client's strengths, interests, and skills with the business product(s) or service(s).	6 (2.3%)	9 (3.4%)	35 (13.3%)	121 (45.8%)	93 (35.2%)
Market research / business feasibility (Gathering data and documents that the business concept can generate sufficient revenue).	10 (3.8%)	10 (3.8%)	40 (15.2%)	110 (41.7%)	94 (35.6%)
Developing Marketing Plans.	11 (4.2%)	20 (7.6%)	59 (22.3%)	106 (40.2%)	68 (25.8%)

Topics	Not at all	Little Importance	Neutral	Important	Absolutely Essential
Determining key business tasks, the timelines, and who will be responsible (operational plans).	9 (3.4%)	14 (5.3%)	55 (20.8%)	110 (41.7%)	76 (28.8%)
Calculating Business Financial Projections	11 (4.2%)	16 (6.1%)	51 (19.3%)	103 (39.0%)	83 (31.4%)
Making referrals for technical assistance for the VR client such as support with marketing research, writing a business plan, etc.	3 (1.1%)	9 (3.4%)	33 (12.5%)	123 (46.6%)	96 (36.4%)
Identifying funding for self-employment other than VR funding, such as Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS).	5 (1.9%)	5 (1.9%)	26 (9.8%)	129 (48.9%)	99 (37.5%)
Reviewing and evaluating business financials	12 (4.5%)	15 (5.7%)	53 (20.1%)	112 (42.4%)	72 (27.3%)
Determining when a self-employment case can be closed successfully.	2 (0.8%)	13 (4.9%)	27 (10.2%)	118 (44.7%)	104 (39.4%)
Identifying available resources to support self-employment in my community/region	2 (0.8%)	7 (2.7%)	24 (9.1%)	141 (53.4%)	90 (34.1%)
Long term support available for self-employment	3 (1.1%)	11 (4.2%)	47 (17.8%)	131 (49.6%)	72 (27.3%)

SUMMARY

One of the outcomes for the Center on Self-Employment, Business Ownership, and Telecommuting is a training curriculum on self-employment for VR professionals. By asking about their training needs, the Center is engaging them to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to their needs, are understandable, and are used to improve the self-employment outcomes of people with disabilities.

Caution should be taken when generalizing these results to all VR professionals due to the small sample size. In addition, not all states are represented in sample. Participants volunteered to respond to the needs assessment, and they may have had a personal interest in self-employment for individuals with disabilities. Therefore, these responses may not represent the opinions of all VR professionals. However, this information may provide a snapshot as to what VR professionals report as important self-employment training topics. Other briefs in this series will present additional information on this topic such as what VR professionals reported as their personal training needs.



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