

INFORMATION BRIEF #4

RESULTS FROM A NATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT ON SELF-EMPLOYMENT: THE SELF-REPORTED TRAINING NEEDS AND OPINIONS OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROFESSIONALS

This brief provides information from a national online needs assessment of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) professionals who were recruited with the assistance of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). Two hundred and sixty-four VR counselors and agency personnel from 29 states participated in the online needs assessment. The majority were employed by a State General VR Agency (87.8%, n=231); 10.3% (n=27) were employed by a State Blind Agency; and the remaining 1.9% (n=5) responded "other." When asked if they were located in a rural, suburban, or urban geographic location, the greatest percentage selected rural (45.2%, n=119). Approximately 36% reported that they were located in a suburban geographic location; and 19.0% (n=50) responded urban. This brief focuses on the self-reported training needs of VR professionals for assisting clients whose employment goal is self-employment.

A previous brief reported additional information on the participants' demographics and agency characteristics as well as the participants' perceptions of essential training topics for VR professionals. That brief, Information Brief #3, can be found on the Center's website with other resources: <https://centeronselfemployment.org/resources/papers>.

WHAT DO VR PROFESSIONALS REPORT AS THEIR PERSONAL TRAINING NEEDS?

Table 1 summarizes the data on whether participants felt that they personally needed training on the self-employment topics. The items in the table are presented in the order that they appeared in the needs assessment. At least half or more of the participants reported that they probably or definitely needed training on the topics presented in Table 1.

Some of the highest reported training needs included the following items. However, the differences in these items and all items listed in Table 1 are small and should be interpreted with caution.

- Identifying available resources to support self-employment in my community/region
Probably - 111 (42.0%)
Definitely - 76 (28.8%)
- Long term support available for self-employment
Probably - 110 (41.7%)
Definitely - 68 (25.8%)
- Identifying funding for self-employment other than VR funding, such as Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS)
Probably - 109 (41.3%)
Definitely - 86 (32.6%)
- Impact of self-employment income and assets on public benefits, including use of work incentives (e.g., Property Essential to Self-Support, 1619(b), Medicaid Buy-In)
Probably - 108 (40.9%)
Definitely - 82 (31.1%)
- Aligning the VR client's strengths, interests, and skills with the business product(s) or service(s).
Probably - 100 (37.9%)
Definitely - 46 (17.4%)

At least 20% of respondents rated a number of items as “neutral” regarding their personal needs for training. These items include the following as examples: 1) Calculating Business Financial Projections; 2) Market research / business feasibility (Gathering data and documents that the business concept can generate sufficient revenue); 3) Long term support available for self-employment; 4) Working with a VR client that has not developed their business concept; 5) Working with a client who appears to need significant or ongoing support operating a business; 6) Determining key business tasks, the timelines, and who will be responsible (operational plans). It is not known why the respondents believe that they did not need training in these areas. Additional analysis is being conducted to determine if there is a relationship between respondent demographics and their need for training.

TABLE 1

Do you personally need training on this topic?

Topics	Definitely not	Probably Not	Neutral	Probably	Definitely
Self-employment state policies (n=264)	7 (2.7%)	33 (12.5%)	34 (12.9%)	95 (36%)	95 (36%)
Providing guidance and counseling on self-employment policy and practices to VR clients.	11 (4.2%)	31 (12.1%)	31 (12.1%)	97 (36.7%)	92 (34.8%)
Discussing the opportunities and challenges of self-employment with VR clients.	12 (4.5%)	38 (14.4%)	29 (11.0%)	105 (39.8%)	80 (30.3%)
Developing an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for self-employment.	14 (5.3%)	46 (17.4%)	33 (12.5%)	88 (33.3%)	83 (31.4%)
Developing and facilitating teams to support self-employment.	9 (3.4%)	29 (11.0%)	67 (25.4%)	95 (36.0%)	64 (24.2%)
Assisting the VR client in	14 (5.3%)	31 (11.7%)	42 (15.9%)	89 (33.7%)	88 (33.3%)

Topics	Definitely not	Not	Neutral	Probably	Definitely
developing a business plan.					
Understanding business structures (sole-proprietorships, partnerships, LLCs, corporations, nonprofits).	15 (5.7%)	25 (9.5%)	41 (15.5%)	88 (33.3%)	95 (36.0)
Impact of business structure on public benefits.	12 (4.5%)	34 (12.9%)	47 (17.8%)	97 (36.7%)	74 (28.0%)
Impact of self-employment income and assets on public benefits, including use of work incentives (e.g., Property Essential to Self-Support, 1619(b), Medicaid Buy-In).	9 (3.4%)	28 (10.6%)	37 (14.0%)	108 (40.9%)	82 (31.1%)
Working with a VR client that has not developed their business concept (e.g., products or services).	16 (6.1%)	37 (14.0%)	59 (22.3%)	90 (34.1%)	62 (23.5%)
Working with a VR client whose business concept does not appear to be feasible.	18 (6.8%)	41(15.5%)	43 (16.3%)	92 (34.8%)	70 (26.5%)
Working with a VR client who has no experience with self-employment.	15 (5.7%)	41 (15.5%)	48 (18.2%)	94 (35.6%)	66 (25.0%)
Working with a client who appears to need significant or ongoing support operating a business (e.g. supported self-employment.)	12 (4.5%)	27 (10.2%)	50 (28.9%)	95 (36.0%)	80 (30.3%)
Aligning the VR client's strengths, interests, and skills with the business product(s) or service(s).	13 (4.9%)	49 (18.6%)	56 (21.2%)	100 (37.9%)	46 (17.4%)

Topics	Definitely not	Probably Not	Neutral	Probably	Definitely
Market research / business feasibility (Gathering data and documents that the business concept can generate sufficient revenue).	12 (4.5%)	32 (12.1%)	56 (21.2%)	93 (35.2%)	71 (26.9%)
Developing Marketing Plans.	20 (7.6%)	37 (14.0%)	54 (20.5%)	92 (34.8%)	61 (23.1%)
Determining key business tasks, the timelines, and who will be responsible (operational plans).	13 (4.9%)	42 (15.9%)	63 (23.9%)	93 (35.2%)	53 (20.1%)
Calculating Business Financial Projections	19 (7.2%)	29 (11.0%)	56 (21.2%)	84 (31.8%)	76 (28.8%)
Making referrals for technical assistance for the VR client such as support with marketing research, writing a business plan, etc.	18 (6.8%)	34 (12.9%)	46 (17.4%)	93 (35.2%)	73 (27.7%)
Identifying funding for self-employment other than VR funding, such as Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS).	12 (4.5%)	25 (9.5%)	32 (12.1%)	109 (41.3%)	86 (32.6%)
Reviewing and evaluating business financials	21 (8.0%)	32 (12.1%)	57 (21.6%)	89 (33.7%)	65 (24.6%)
Determining when a self-employment case can be closed successfully.	15 (5.7%)	35 (13.3%)	41 (15.5%)	95 (36.0%)	78 (29.5%)
Identifying available resources to support self-employment in my community/region	8 (3.0%)	24 (9.1%)	45 (17.0%)	111 (42.0%)	76 (28.8%)
Long term support available for self-employment	7 (2.7%)	25 (9.5%)	54 (20.5%)	110 (41.7%)	68 (25.8%)

WHAT ARE THE ATTITUDES OF VR PROFESSIONALS REGARDING SELF-EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES?

Participants were asked their opinions on various statements about self-employment for individuals with disabilities. They were told that there were no right or wrong answers and that their responses were confidential. Overall, the respondents appeared to have positive perceptions of individuals with disabilities being able to pursue self-employment as a vocational goal. As an example, approximately 68% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that VR clients who want to pursue self-employment should be given the opportunity regardless of the person's disability.

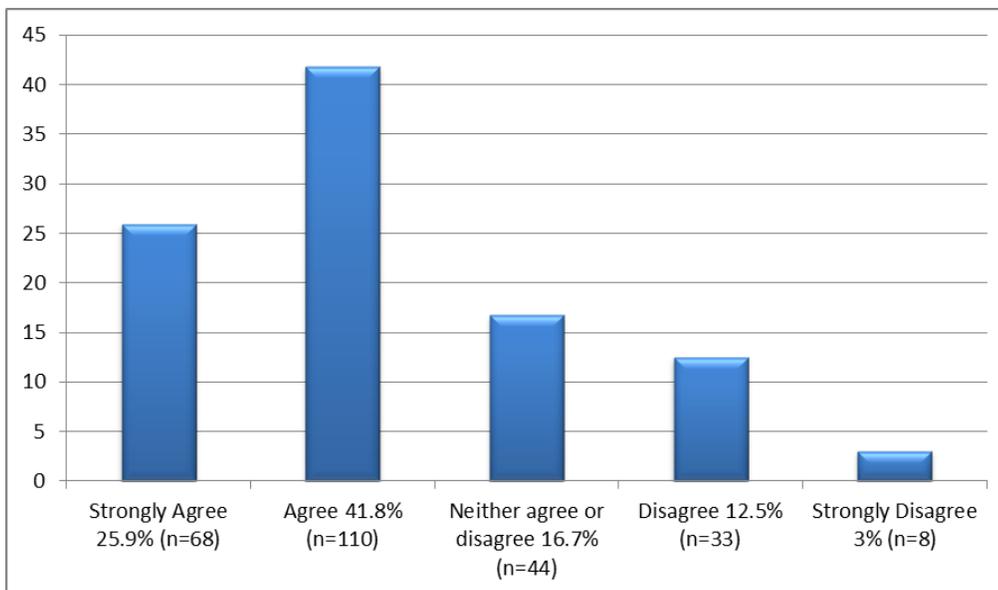


Figure 1: *A VR client who wants to pursue self-employment should be given the opportunity regardless of the person's disability.*

Stated in a different way, VR counselors were asked to consider the following statement: Individuals with the most significant disabilities are less likely to be successful in self-employment. Approximately 53% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement indicating that level of disability is not related to success in self-employment. Only 10.2% agreed or strongly agreed that individuals with the most significant disabilities are less likely to be successful in self-employment,

while approximately 37% were neutral on the statement.

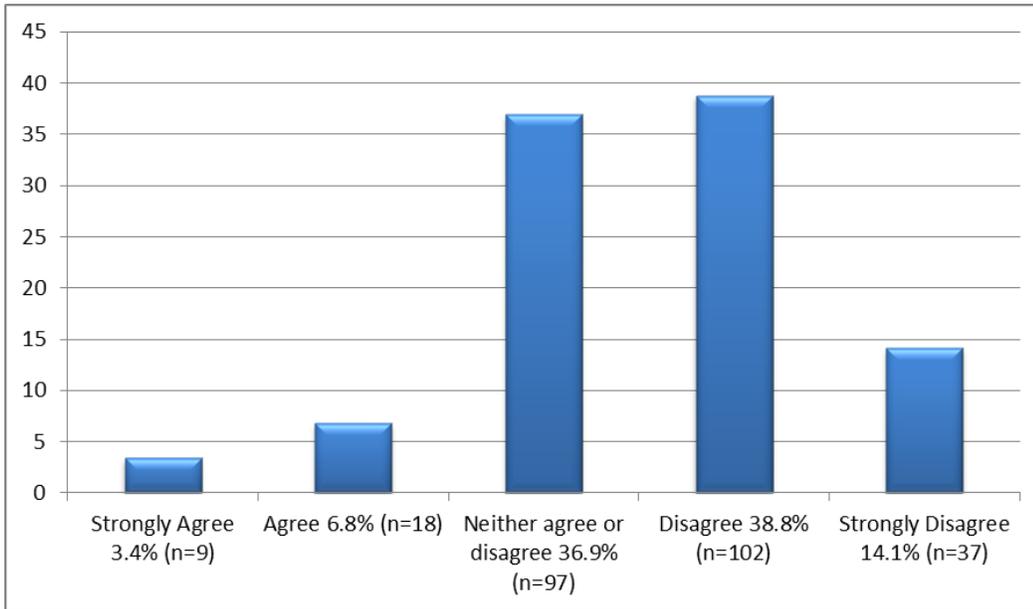


Figure 2: *Individuals with the most significant disabilities are less likely to be successful in self-employment.*

Another statement demonstrating positive attitudes towards self-employment was the following: All clients, regardless if they will need ongoing assistance, can achieve self-employment if they have access to the needed supports. Approximately 49% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement; 22.4% strongly disagreed or disagreed; and 29.2% were neutral on the statement. One additional statement regarding self-employment that seems to indicate a positive attitude towards clients being able to achieve self-employment was the following: A VR client with no work experience should be discouraged from pursuing self-employment as their employment goal. Only 17% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement; while almost 50% strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement.

SUMMARY

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 their training needs on self-employment. Please visit the Center's website for additional resources on self-employment: <https://centeronselfemployment.org/index.cfm>



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The contents of this information brief were funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (Grant#H263E200005). The ideas, opinions, and conclusions expressed do not represent recommendations, endorsements, or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. VCU is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution providing access to education and employment without regard to age, race, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, veteran's status, political affiliation, or disability. If special accommodations are needed, please contact Teri Blankenship at tcblanke@vcu.edu.