

Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services Consumer Satisfaction Survey (Higher Negative Result) – FFY2024

Return Rate:

The IVRS return rate is comparable with other state VR agencies.

- FFY24: 7%
- FFY23: 7%
- Prior years: 12%

Successful Closures:

- The satisfaction rate for all questions over the past four years has been positive with no significant concerns.
- Of the main questions, 86% was the lowest satisfaction rate; most are in the 90th percentile.

Unsuccessful Closures:

- Of the main questions, 49% was the lowest satisfaction rate for “I am employed or more prepared for employment because of the services I received.”
- Even with the unsuccessful closures, the majority of satisfaction rates are over 70%.

Questions

1. I am satisfied with the way my counselor related to me.
 - a) Unsuccessfully Closed: 1 in 5 were unsatisfied. In FFY15 - 22%, FFY16 - 19%, FFY17 - 19%, FFY18 - 19%, FFY19 – 21%, FFY20 - 16%, FFY21 – 21%, FFY22 – 20%, FFY23 – 25%, FFY24 – 23%.
2. My counselor took my concerns seriously.
 - a) Unsuccessfully Closed: 1 in 5 were unsatisfied. FFY15 – 23%, FFY16 – 21%, FFY17 – 19%, FFY18 – 19%, FFY19 – 20%, FFY20 – 14%, FFY21 – 20%, FFY22 – 18%, FFY23 – 23%, FFY24 – 23%.
3. My counselor understood my needs.
 - a) Unsuccessfully Closed: Nearly 1 in 4 were unsatisfied. FFY15 – 23%, FFY16 – 22%, FFY17 – 19%, FFY18 – 19%, FFY19 – 24%, FFY20 – 17%, FFY21 – 23%, FFY22 – 22%, FFY23 – 25%, FFY24 – 26%.
 - 3b. My counselor helped me find resources in the community?
 - a) Unsuccessfully Closed: 1 in 5 were unsatisfied.

IVRS Response

Historically, IVRS has invested time and resources into training on Motivational Interviewing (MI) as a technique to improve the relationship between counselor and job candidate. This is an evidence-based, collaborative counseling method focused on empathy, empowerment, and the motivation for change.

In FFY 24, IVRS has prioritized MI by selecting a counselor in the field as an MI Lead. This ensures that IVRS can provide intensive technical assistance and training to area office staff in the use of MI. It also ensures continued prioritization of MI as an innovative way to communicate and relate to job candidates.

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IVRS state-level staff with specific specialty areas provide training and technical assistance to the field to ensure field staff have the resources they need to provide quality services to job candidates. A component of this technical assistance is training on counseling methods and techniques through the training team. In-person, on demand, and recorded trainings are available for staff to utilize as needed to build tools that ensure a quality counselor/job candidate relationship.

Job candidates often present to IVRS with a variety of concerns, including financial constraints. This is especially true when the job candidate is a recipient of SSI/SSDI and there are worries about how their benefits will be impacted by returning to work. IVRS works diligently to address these concerns. For benefits planning, IVRS provides a tiered approach for benefits planning:

The first level is for staff to become conversational in basic benefits information (e.g., what is the difference between SSI and SSDI; what is a trial work period; what is a BPQY, etc.). This information ensures that anyone on staff is able to provide a job candidate with basic information on benefits. This is referred to as Benefits 101 training. This support at the first level will generally culminate with obtaining signatures to gather additional SSA information that can provide more specific information to a job candidate with benefits.

The second level is more targeted to the specific needs of the individual. The professional staff assigned to the individual receive additional benefits training and are able to provide simple information about benefits and work, with a basic interpretation of the information from the individual's BPQY. The professional staff are provided with technical assistance, training, and cheat sheets suitable to this level of involvement. The staff are also able to consult with the Benefits Cadre Liaison for mentoring. Each office has a Liaison assigned, who can provide more specific training and decide when it is time to involve the Benefits Planning Resource Manager.

The third tier includes the Benefits Cadre members and the Benefits Planning Resource Manager. This cadre meets periodically for guidance and training. They are dedicated to the benefits planning process and have regular opportunities for intensive training. The expectation is not that they will provide benefits planning for their whole office. But instead, they are trained to step in when the second tier is not sufficient and requires more specific information.

The Iowa Blueprint for Change is a federal grant awarded to IVRS to provide competitive integrated employment opportunities to individuals currently in, or traditionally targeted for, subminimum wage employment. Through these efforts, IVRS has purchased the DB101 website for Iowa. This is another resource offered free of charge for all individuals throughout the State of Iowa, including all individuals working with IVRS.

IVRS staff are expected to provide financial literacy to job candidates, as appropriate, especially for services that may require a financial contribution. This includes education and training for job candidates.

For other concerns, IVRS provides information and referral to appropriate resources in the local community to assist individuals. This includes warm handoffs whenever possible, and assistance with connections.

IVRS works closely with other core partners to focus on co-enrollment and braiding of services. This ensures an individual's needs are met by the most appropriate entity providing the service. The

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government realignment has provided an excellent opportunity for IVRS to take advantage of a broader access to services that support individuals and their needs and concerns.

IVRS has incorporated a Quality Improvement process with a dedicated Quality Improvement team that reviews case files and provides technical assistance and training in areas where counselors have areas of improvement. The team reviews customer satisfaction survey results and provides recommendations for areas of improvement for the agency, including policy changes and other operational suggestions. IVRS also has a dedicated Training team that includes a staff member responsible for providing new staff training and coaching. This ensures staff are trained and adequately prepared for ensuring concerns are taken seriously.

All applicants receive a comprehensive assessment for eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs. This assessment provides information on the specific needs of the individual and is utilized in the planning process.

Each eligible job candidate develops an individualized plan for employment (IPE) that includes their specific employment goal in competitive integrated employment. Services are identified utilizing the comprehensive assessment information that IVRS staff gather during the intake, eligibility and plan development processes. The IPE includes a list of specific services designed to meet the unique needs of each individual to ensure rehabilitation and placement in competitive integrated employment.

Through conversations with the job candidate, IVRS staff also learn about the needs of the individual, including their personality, interests, interpersonal skills, intelligence and related functional capacities, educational achievements, work experience, vocational aptitudes, personal and social adjustments, employment opportunities, and the medical, psychiatric, psychological, and other pertinent vocational, educational, cultural, social, recreational, and environmental factors that affect the employment and rehabilitation needs of the individual. This information ensures that IVRS staff are providing individualized services that meet the specific and unique needs of each person served.

IVRS provides a wide range of resources to assist individuals with disabilities obtain employment. This includes resources at the Federal, state and local level. This information is expected to be shared throughout the rehabilitation process.



Questions

6. I am satisfied with how well VR prepared me for employment.

- a) Unsuccessfully Closed: Over 1 in 4 were unsatisfied. FFY15 – 32%, FFY16 – 28%, FFY17 – 26%, FFY18 – 25%, FFY19 – 36%, FFY20 – 27%, FFY21 – 27%, FFY22 – 29%, FFY23 – 28%, FFY24 – 33%.

6e. I received all agreed upon services in the time-frame that met my needs?

Unsuccessfully Closed: 1 in 5 were unsatisfied.

7. I am employed or more prepared for employment because of the services I received?

- a) Unsuccessfully Closed: Almost 1 in 2 were unsatisfied. FFY15 – 43%, FFY16 – 39%, FFY17 – 40%, FFY18 – 38%, FFY19 – 45%, FFY20 – 38%, FFY21 – 42%, FFY22 – 40%, FFY23 – 42%, FFY24 – 44%.

7a. Services I received helped to decrease or remove the challenges I had related to employment?

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Unsuccessfully Closed: 1 in 3 was not satisfied.

7b. I can independently search for employment?

Unsuccessfully Closed: 1 in 6 was not satisfied.

7c. I can identify and request appropriate accommodations from an employer?

Unsuccessfully Closed: 1 in 5 was not satisfied.

7d. I obtained or am more prepared for a job that matches my skills and interests?

Unsuccessfully Closed: 1 in 4 was not satisfied.

7e. IVRS staff helped me achieve my employment goal?

Unsuccessfully Closed: 1 in 3 was not satisfied.

IVRS Response

Survey questions 6 and 7 focus on employment outcome, therefore, the expectation would be the unsuccessful job candidates would not be as satisfied due to the fact the job candidate did not get placed in employment. IVRS saw an increase in satisfaction in these two areas as IVRS has focused on client-centered services so even if a JC is not employed they are more prepared for employment.

A number of factors may have played into the rates seen. First, IVRS increased the number of new providers offering the Iowa Blueprint for Change Customized Employment service. This resulted in excellent information for job candidates and parents/guardians that will support ongoing career development, irrelevant of successful or unsuccessful closure. However, many of these providers are new to the service and therefore not yet fully trained on how to reach fidelity. The result is extended time in reaching expected phases of customized employment. For example, the Discovery phase is estimated to take approximately 90 days. In some cases, with the new providers, these activities were still being conducted 9 to 12 months into the authorization of services.

IVRS is in the process of developing the Business Engagement team, a joint effort between IVRS and other Iowa Workforce Development Business Engagement division. The intent with this team is to provide better placement of job candidates in competitive integrated employment, leading to higher levels of placement and satisfaction. The team is undergoing planning and training, but the team will focus on enhancing business relationships, decreasing time for job seekers waiting for placement, and opening up CRP capacity so that Job Developers and Employment Specialists are not working in silos.

The IVRS Business Engagement Resource Manager is working with local IVRS area offices to provide a job club opportunity for job candidates. The job club will prepare job candidates for employment by building their toolkit, providing resources, and learning firsthand from employers on what skills they are seeking.

IVRS hired an Assistive Technology Counselor Specialist, who is directly involved in the development of policies, procedures, and services. The position provides support to the IVRS counselor and the job candidate for all home and vehicle modifications, creating a smoother process and providing informed choice for job candidates. The position also assists field staff in researching and identifying assistive technology options that increase accessibility for job candidates served. The intent is to remove barriers that can prevent job candidates from becoming successfully employed.

The IVRS Self-Employment Counselors are working diligently on establishing relationships with various community agencies that can enhance self-employment services received. These relationships will hopefully provide additional support for job candidates and lead to better outcomes and increased satisfaction upon case closure.

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Question

9. I needed services that IVRS could not provide before I was ready for employment?

- a) Successfully Closed: FFY15 – 72%, FFY16 – 72%, FFY17 – 70%, FFY18 – 73%, FFY19 – 75%, FFY20 – 76%, FFY21 – 73%, FFY22 – 70%, FFY23 – 69%, FFY24 – 72% did not need other services that VR could not provide.
- b) Unsuccessfully Closed: FFY15 – 47%, FFY16 – 48%, FFY17 – 60%, FFY18 – 45%, FFY19 – 50%, FFY20 – 56%, FFY21 – 56%, FFY22 – 62%, FFY23 – 62%, FFY24 – 61% did not need other services that VR could not provide.

IVRS Response

Question 9 focuses on services IVRS is unable to provide. IVRS follows the scope of services for job candidates outlined in 34 CFR Part 361. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) provides oversight to IVRS and ensures that IVRS establishes policies that provide guidance and information related to the scope of services. These policies are required to be posted publicly, so individuals with disabilities have information related to the services available.

While IVRS is able to provide a wide range of services, not every job candidate will have access to every service. This is due to the fact that IVRS services are individualized to the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and needs of the individual. As such, services will vary based on these needs as well as the employment goal selected mutually by the individual and the counselor. When IVRS is unable to provide a service to an individual, every attempt is made to provide information and referral to the appropriate federal, state or local entity that can provide the service, should that service be available. All state-level staff with a specialty area (e.g., Benefits Planning, Business Engagement, CRP, etc.) are required to provide technical assistance, including available referral sources, to local area office staff. This ensures that a subject matter expert is available to provide the most updated information regarding available services within the state.

Within the Iowa Blueprint for Change grant, IVRS has maintained a strong focus on Individual Placement and Support (IPS) services. IPS is an evidence-based practice for supported employment services. In FFYs 23 – 24, IVRS had a major increase in providers offering IPS as a service. As IPS is considered a wrap-around model, some job candidates may have felt they did not require or receive specific services, since they are already built into the model. Examples of this include: prescription management, benefits counseling, financial literacy/payee services, transportation support, mental health, and housing.

The IVRS Quality Improvement team is holding discussions regarding targeted case file reviews of case closures to ensure job candidates are being referred appropriately when their case file is closed unsuccessfully. This would provide information from the counselor perspective on services and referrals.

Questions

10. I had a satisfactory experience through IVRS?

- a) Unsuccessfully Closed: 1 in 4 were not satisfied. FFY15 – 22%, FFY16 – 22%, FFY17 – 24%, FFY18 – 19%, FFY19 – 28%, FFY20 – 21%, FFY21 – 27%, FFY22 – 20%, FFY23 – 28%, FFY24 – 30%.

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13. My Plan for Employment was carried out to my satisfaction?

a) Unsuccessfully Closed: 1 in 3 were not satisfied. FFY15 – 30%, FFY16 – 37%, FFY17 – 28%, FFY18 – 30%, FFY19 – 40%, FFY20 – 33%, FFY21 – 39%, FFY22 – 29%, FFY23 – 36%, FFY24 – 39%.

13a. All services that I needed to be successfully employed were provided?

Unsuccessfully Closed. 1 in 4 were not satisfied.

13b. Everyone involved in my plan worked well together to address issues?

Unsuccessfully Closed. 1 in 4 were not satisfied.

IVRS Response

IVRS has been able to expand service delivery to the most significantly disabled population through the Iowa Blueprint for Change grant. These individuals were traditionally targeted for subminimum wage employment, day habilitation, adult daycare, or other environments that don't meet the federal RSA definition of competitive integrated employment. IVRS is also strengthening its commitment to becoming an Employment First state, to ensure that all agencies and individuals within the state begin with the premise that employment should be the first, and not the last option for individuals with disabilities. A proclamation was signed by Governor Reynolds in October of 2024, including Employment First language for the first time in Iowa.

In 2024, the Iowa Blueprint for Change collaborated with IVRS and other agency staff to provide Employment First training across the state. The first training occurred in July, and resulted in 90 participants including staff from CRPs; VR; MCOs; IWD; HHS; and more. The second training was held in November, and yielded 110 participants. The attendance, combined with interest in agencies participating, has demonstrated that the concept of Employment First is being realized by partnering agencies and providers, who have the greatest influence on supporting employment for individuals, especially those with the most significant disabilities. These activities will set the stage for greater satisfaction for individuals served through IVRS and other employment-based agencies.

Under the state realignment, IVRS was integrated within Iowa Workforce Development. This move allowed IVRS to have access to numerous resources within the broader Workforce Development agency, providing opportunity for braiding of funding and services that allows IVRS to improve outcomes for job candidates. The integration not only opened up existing programs and services; it also paved the way for innovative partnerships that benefit job candidates. As a result of this expansion of service, IVRS was able to eliminate the waiting list entirely for the first time. This occurred between July and September of 2024. This ensures IVRS staff are able to go directly into services without delay, once they are found eligible for services.

Question

14. VR staff adequately accommodated my disability?

a) Unsuccessfully Closed. 1 in 5 were not satisfied. FFY15 – 25%, FFY16 – 19%, FFY17 – 22%, FFY18 – 17%, FFY19 – 23%, FFY20 – 17%, FFY21 – 22%, FFY22 – 14%, FFY23 – 22%, FFY24 – 23%.

IVRS Response

IVRS continuously works to address any ADA accessibility issues. The local area office supervisors discuss with the property owner the issues that have been identified and timing of correcting the issues.

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Accessibility studies have been conducted for each co-located area, which provides recommendations for changes to make the location more accessible. The One-Stop centers will also undergo a certification process during this fiscal year, with a pre-certification occurring to ensure areas have awareness of potential issues and have time to correct them before they go through full certification. Cross-training of all center staff is a part of the certification process, to ensure all staff within the center feel equipped to provide appropriate accommodation to individuals with disabilities. Each local area has a local plan and MOU/IFA that provides additional information specific to the local area, and plans for accommodation specific to individuals with disabilities.



Overall Comments

Overall, IVRS has seen improvements across the board in most areas. As an agency, IVRS continues to review policies, procedures, processes and regulations regularly to seek out strategies to improve the job candidate experience with IVRS. The new Quality Improvement team has begun conducting case file reviews of area offices. The expectation is that the team will complete case file reviews of all area offices on an annual basis. This will assist IVRS in establishing a baseline for performance. It will also allow leadership to assess whether progress is made in all IVRS offices, to continue to move staff from compliance to quality services. The team is also developing a staff survey that will allow area office staff to provide feedback to leadership on services provided by the state-level team.

Some of the highlights:

- Successful Closures satisfaction rates are averaging over 90%.
- Unsuccessful Closures satisfaction rate are averaging 70%.
- Motivational Interviewing continues to be a focus. IVRS has an MI lead counselor who become MINT certified (Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers) and will consider ways to use this to increase staff skills.
- IVRS Administrator and Deputy Administrator have worked to restructure the Planning and Development (PDT) team over the last year. This has included in-depth time studies, interviews, and restructuring of PDQs and PPEs. The restructure has ensured that IVRS has the correct staff in the correct positions, able to offer the best technical assistance to the field possible.
- IVRS has dedicated staff throughout the state providing transition services. This includes eight Rehabilitation Counselor Specialists specifically focused on transition that can provide guidance to area office staff.
- IVRS has implemented contracts with our CRP partners. This ensures that services provided through CRPs are consistent and are in alignment with both IVRS and RSA expectations.
- The IVRS CRP and Business Engagement Resource Managers are collaborating to create pathways for CRP job developers and job coaches to collaborate with IWD business services. This provides a more unified and resourceful group and streamlines employer efforts.
- IVRS has had an increase of CRP providers, from 65 to 90 in FFY23-24. Of these, 15 are independent providers. This allows IVRS to address employment workforce issues that previously would significantly impact quality and timeliness of services. IVRS Administration is also supporting formal training for IVRS staff to provide job development and job coaching. This further assisted job candidates with employment supports in a timelier manner, especially in areas where CRPs had waiting lists for services.

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- IVRS is reviewing our delivery of services and staffing to increase service capacity to businesses as well as a braided Business Engagement Team to maximize shared opportunities.
- IVRS is has expanded the remote VR team. This team is designed to triage field needs and provide support to area offices that demonstrate the greatest need.
- IVRS maintains a Deaf Services Advisory Team. This team provides feedback and offers strategies to improve service delivery for job candidates who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. The team is also equipped to provide training for staff and partners on best practices for communicating with individuals within this population.