

Using a Projection Tool to Effectively Manage Fiscal and Staffing Resources to Better Serve Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities

Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Abstract

The Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has been in an Order of Selection since 1994. Developed by a former deputy administrator in 2006, DVR uses a projection tool to effectively manage fiscal and staffing resources to ensure priority-service delivery for individuals with the most significant disabilities (MSD), while also engaging customers with less significant disabilities who are on a waitlist. Using this tool has helped the agency to meet its performance goals and to increase its rehabilitation rate for customers with MSD.

Background

In 2004, DVR faced difficulty securing a full state-funding match and simultaneously experienced an unanticipated and significant increase in college-tuition rates, a key cost for training services. The impact was insufficient funding for services to new applicants, which resulted in wait-listing all new applicants for one to 2+ years, including applicants with MSD. The agency experienced funding swings over a period of several years, which made it difficult to manage the budget and impacted services to customers, particularly due to concurrent swings in waitlist length and anticipated wait time.

In response, senior staff reviewed their strategic approach to managing financial and staffing resources, which, in turn, led to the development of a projection tool, updated with daily caseload activity and financial data feeds from “dashboard reports.” DVR also established a reports team to monitor fiscal and staffing resources and to make data-driven decisions regarding waitlist management.

Purpose, Goals, and Implementation

The purpose of the projection tool is to help DVR to more effectively manage fiscal and staffing resources by using historical and current trend data to calculate service-capacity projections. The goal is to continue serving individuals with MSD on a priority basis without any wait time and those with significant disabilities (SD) within six months. Specifically, fiscal projections calculated with the projection tool are driven by past, current, and forecasted average employment-plan costs for each month relative to anticipated case-services budget resources.

Development of the projection tool

A former deputy administrator developed the tool with input from DVR’s Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). Traditionally, fiscal years were used for budgetary planning, but the group decided to focus on the average life of an employment plan (26–27 months) as a more practical measure. Starting with 2005 base data, the group focused on caseload, budget, and expenditures for the upcoming 12 months, using these data to project two years out. Since then, the tool has evolved, allowing DVR to project five years into the future.

Description of the projection tool and use for resource management

The tool consists of three different Excel-based tables that calculate caseload, waitlist, and budget projections, respectively. A fourth table focuses on staff capacity for service delivery. Projections are calculated by formulas within the tables in relation to updated data points entered by the reports team. This allows each table to be updated and adjusted when data change or new data are received, and is done on an ongoing basis.

CASELOAD PROJECTIONS are used to manage current caseloads and to anticipate the agency’s ability to fund customers by managing waitlist releases and subsequent changes in caseload size. Data are used to monitor current fiscal resources and to

manage future fiscal resources that affect caseloads (e.g., total monthly expenditures for services and monthly expenses per customer).

WAITLIST PROJECTIONS are used to monitor and manage current waitlist data and to anticipate changes in the size of the waitlist and wait times. Projections are also used to identify potential problems (e.g., wait time increases beyond acceptable number of months), allowing staff to address those problems early and effectively.

BUDGET PROJECTIONS are used to monitor and manage the agency's budget by combining the carry-over amount with the projected budget for the following fiscal year, which make up the total budget available to the agency. This helps ensure that the budget is sufficient to provide services over the average employment-plan time of 26–27 months.

STAFFING PROJECTIONS are used to examine staff capacity and to allocate field staff accordingly. Projections are used to identify the target number of staff, vacancies, and the percentage of staff working in each service area. This information is then used to prioritize vacancies when getting approval to hire new staff.

Raising counselor awareness of the projection tool

DVR uses a management-information system called the “dashboard reporting system” that is accessible to all staff and incorporates all of the DVR data for the combined program, as well as the caseload, waitlist, budget, and staffing projection tables.

Dashboard reports are reviewed in team meetings and new staff trainings to familiarize staff with their use. These reports are also reviewed in workforce area meetings and at a local and state level to track DVR service-area performance and Wisconsin's overall performance on Rehabilitation Services Administration measures. Individual counselors also use these reports to track their case-management functions, performance (individual and by workforce area), and fiscal information.

Results

AGENCY LEVEL AND PERFORMANCE: The projection tool allows DVR management to track budget, staff, and funding resources. DVR is no longer struggling with budget swings and wide variances in waitlist size and wait time, and has been able to serve individuals with MSD with no wait and individuals with SD with less than a six-month wait for the past five years.

STAFF LEVEL: Use of the tool has positively impacted staff morale, as well as achieving agency performance goals. DVR has been able to use the tool to assist in hiring and prioritizing which positions need to be filled first. This prevents any one workforce area from becoming disproportionately understaffed.

CUSTOMER LEVEL: Other notable results of the projection tool and the agency's enhanced use of data have been observed in the response of customers. A key informant reported that communication between counselors and customers about anticipated wait time as well as a higher degree of transparency regarding funds available for services has positively impacted customer retention and satisfaction, particularly for those with SD.

COUNSELORS, CUSTOMERS, AND EXTERNAL PARTIES HAVE GREATER LEVELS OF ACCESS TO FISCAL INFORMATION. As a result, counselors are more transparent in their communication with customers and there is a more service-oriented process of deciding whether requested services are necessary or not.

EXTERNAL PARTNERS: DVR's increased emphasis on using data to make decisions has influenced the way that the State Rehabilitation Council uses data and engages in advocacy. This has resulted in an increase in credibility with state government officials and agency partners based on the council's shift in advocacy efforts to include evidence.

For more information about this practice (or to obtain a copy of the projection tool), please contact:

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