RehabData WorkGroup

Monday, February 3, 2020

3:00 p.m. Eastern

**Christopher Pope:** Hello, everyone, and welcome to the first RehabData WorkGroup webinar. We're really excited to be sharing with you today the measurable skill gains tool that the WorkGroup has developed and rolled out with you last week. So, you might be asking yourself, where did this RehabData WorkGroup come from? What is the RehabData WorkGroup doing and who the members of the work group are, so I want to take a couple of minutes to explain the background of the WorkGroup and how we got to where we are today and then later towards the end of the webinar, talk about where we intend to go.

So the RehabData WorkGroup developed as sort of an offshoot of the ReThink VR performance initiative that VR agencies, and membership organizations engaged in over the spring and summer of 2019. Through that initiative, that team of stakeholders identified a need to really dig in to data, to talk about what the data is showing us, to talk about ways we can use data and talk about ways we can actually assess the performance of the VR program. The Data WorkGroup is charged with a couple of things, and if we could go to the next slide, we'll talk about what the mission is here.

So the WorkGroup is charged with looking at data in the context of relationship with the WIOA Performance Indicators, those six measures, as well as other VR program measures that matter to the program and how those things impact the VR program, what it means for performance and success of the program. We are committed to developing tools and metrics and things that VR agencies may use to gauge performance, to make the data user-friendly, manageable, and relevant to everyone who might work in a VR agency. Finally, the WorkGroup is helping my colleagues and I at the Rehabilitation Services Administration identify what other data we could provide on a regular basis to help VR agencies assess progress and inform decisions because that is really what we are about doing here, using data to make informed decisions that ultimately affect the lives of the people that we're serving in the program.

So, who is a member of the RehabData WorkGroup? On the next slide, you will see that we listed out all of the members. We are made up of representation from the WINTAC -- that is our colleague Rachel Anderson -- along with five representatives from VR agencies -- Bill Colombo from Michigan General, Scott Dennis from Maryland Combined, Natasha Jerde from Minnesota Blind, Adam Leonard from the Texas Workforce Commission, Kristen Mackey from Arizona Combined, and, at RSA, the WorkGroup members are my colleagues Suzanne Mitchell, who is the chief of the VR program unit, and me, Chris Pope as chief of the data unit here in D.C.

So, what is this first tool that we put together? We shared it with VR agencies last week and we're calling it the Measurable Skill Gains tool. What it is, is sort of a synopsis and a look of the first two years of program year data that VR agencies submitted to RSA, and that’s for program years 2017 and 2018. We have a lot of goals for what we intend the tool to do. We want it to provide national and state-level data related to this indicator in an open and transparent way. You will notice that we shared all VR agencies’ data in the same tool, because we want VR agencies to analyze their measurable skill gains data compared to national rates, compared to similar states or agencies that might be a Combined, General, or Blind agency and a variety of other additional ways that well get into here in a few minutes.

We wanted to develop a tool that any VR program could use, including those agencies that may not have the benefit of a data or technology experts to build these tools in-house, so we want it to be functional across, you know, the whole array of the VR agencies regardless in what capacity they have.

Importantly, we hope this tool helps agencies make decisions about supporting individuals with disabilities served by the VR program as they make their way on career pathways. More or less, making progress towards reaching their educational and vocational goals, which as you know, are what measurable skill gains are all about, assessing progress along the way to something bigger.

Finally, we wanted this tool to help VR agencies come to the process of establishing levels of performance for this indicator, for program years 2020 and 2021, which we will be engaging in in the next couple of months with all state VR programs. So that is what the measurable skill gains tool is. There is a couple of things it is not intended to do and we'll go over those now.

We don't want this tool to replace the statutory provisions in the law, obviously. The performance accountability provisions, their implementing regulation and our joint policy guidance still, of course, stands. We also don't want this tool to replace the need for agencies to analyze their RSA-911 data in other ways, using their case management systems, other reporting tools or resources they have or going about their quality assurance activities. We hope and expect that all those good things continue. We also know that this tool does not tell the whole measurable skill gains story, and by that we mean, there are other stories to tell when it comes to measurable skill gains. There are administrative stories, policy stories, the implementation of those policy and procedures stories, so things like internal controls, maintaining source documentation for the various types of measurable skill gains, policies and procedures and then training VR agency staff to implement them are all still very relevant things that this tool does not necessarily get into. More or less, this is a presentation of the data in a way that we hope you find useful and interesting. So with that, I'm going to hand things off to my colleague, Bill Colombo with Michigan General to take it from here. Bill?

**Bill Colombo:** Thanks so much, Chris. Appreciate that. Good afternoon, everybody. I wanted to provide a little more of the background information and set the stage for really how we arrived at this point with the tool. Chris gave a little bit about the what -- what is intended, what’s the purpose. I want to talk about how we got here and not going back too far in history, but let's go back to 2014, and that was the year that we kind of waded into a sea of change. We swam, swam, swam to 2016, life preserver was thrown out in the form of the federal regs, and we are kind of just now emerging on a new shore. And the landscape for VR is really kind of fundamentally different than it was, at least in our recent history or from where we have been in the past. For some of us, the transition may include new or renewed investments and practices that we value and, in our common experience, data seems to sort out as one of those high-value items. I think that is demonstrated, as Chris said, with ReThink at the national level and, highly likely at the state level, there are a lot of initiatives around data as the result of the changes we have been experiencing.

So, for our conversation, data is our North Star. So that is a pretty big topic area but what really matters most right now. And that is one of the points that has driven our conversation and resulted in the tool that we're going to demonstrate. Some of the points that very quickly jump to the top include, well, we know Pre-ETS -- that is really important. What is the impact and how are the outcomes affected by the investment in Pre-ETS? How is the ROI measured? What about exit employed, although not a measure performance indicator, still it’s a leading indicator that should correlate the percent of participants employed first and second and fourth quarter after exit. That continues to be important.

Participant satisfaction. Well, for obvious reasons, that seems to be a data point of interest, at the very least. But ultimately, what the team determined was most important right now was measurable skill gains, and we know that is part of the negotiating levels of performance that are coming for 2020 and 2021. It is a component in our state plans. It is an important topic at many different levels. So that’s what we determined what was most important right now. The team’s first deliverable, as we’re going to go over, focused on MSG because it is important now. Some core ingredients that were baked into this conclusion included, as Chris had mentioned, a format built around data visualization. So why is that something that’s positive, something highly desirable? Well, we want to take an enormous data set and turn it into insight that is easily accessible, it’s understandable, and it’s actionable.

More commonly, this is known as a dashboard. Another component was, ideally, such a dashboard would need to be built on a platform that is readily available or represents the greatest common denominator, aka Excel. Although the evolution may take us in different directions -- Tableau or Microsoft’s Power BI are valuable resources in that area -- Excel really checked the box.

Additional considerations were given to what data points should be included and how they should be displayed. The obvious data sets included PY17 and PY18 as benchmark years in complete sets of data. How about percentages versus numbers? Well, we liked them both, so they made the cut. Nice to know how you're doing, or maybe not, compared to your peer states and agencies, so the ability to compare VR agencies to like agencies or at least three of your closest friends, it's included.

Instead of me going on with describing more about what was included in the decision-making process in the building of the tool, I want to turn it over to Adam Leonard and he is going to walk us through the end product.

**Adam Leonard:** Hello, everybody. So, the screen should have just changed in such a way that you're now seeing an Excel spreadsheet that matches what we sent out -- or what Chris sent out -- last week, and if that is not the case, then this is going to be a really poor demo.

**Rachel Anderson:** Luckily, it is working. Thanks, Adam.

**Adam Leonard:** I'm going to try to blow some stuff up here because this monitor has tiny resolution on it, and it might make it easier for people to read. So the idea, again, it is an Excel workbook. Excel is the number one business intelligence tool in the world right now still because so many people grew up on it and know how to use it. It is also a little easier to make fully accessible, which, of course, is one of the goals when we're working with data in this program and other programs as well, but particularly here, where we have a larger number of concentration of people who might very well need to be accessing the data through Jaws or other screen-reading technology.

The initial tab is just our table of contents. All that’s in here are basically hyperlinks over to the other tabs in the workbook, so we've got our glossary. We have the dashboard itself, the overview dashboard, which is -- I will be going through all of these -- but that is basically where you get to select up to four different entities of data to look at, so you can kind of do that close comparison.

Then there are a series of slides that were created that take agencies and group them together in kind of a single view -- this is PY18 measurable skills gain results for each of the types of agencies. So we have one for Combined agencies, one for Blind agencies, one for General agencies, but then the WorkGroup thought, wouldn't it be helpful to also for those states that operate separate Blind and General, to be able to see what their combined total is, which while the numbers might be kind of close if you added them together and divided, the reality is there could be some duplication in there, so RSA came back and punched up the initial data set to include this new concept that we're calling Total. These are for the states where there normally are two agencies and we’re providing an unduplicated total. Then the last two tabs are actually the data that RSA provided, so the measurable skills gain with gains details and the types of education and training that people were enrolled in, and this is the material from these two tabs, especially measurable skills gain with gain details, is where we drove most of the product.

If we jump over to the glossary -- this is obviously not a substitute for guidance, right? I mean, this is not the RSA-911. This is not the joint PIRL specs exactly. It is meant to be reasonably complete in terms of laying out the concepts, but there are additional details that are in the regulations or other guidance that you, you know, if you want to learn a little bit more about each of these elements, that is where they are from. So we define the terms that we're using and the abbreviations, so VR Combined, which we're denoting with a -C. I know that normally when RSA has put data out, it has usually been -B or -G or leave it blank if Combined. We went ahead and created a -C for Combined because -- then we went down and that new idea for the total of states that are normally split, we put in a -T to differentiate.

Then we have the national numbers, so that is one of the groups that you would be able to select or look at, overall results nationally, and then we thought that states might not just want to look at themselves versus other individual states, but more the aggregate result of states that operate the way that they do. So the Combined states might want to look at the national -C data, which is the weighted average results for all of the Combined states. And then we have the same constructs for the national -- for Blind agencies, what do the national numbers look like there? And for General agencies and then, again, combining that data for the states that normally are split. What are the total state results in those states?

From there, we have got our participant definition, because we use the term throughout, went ahead and put in the PY17 and 18 periods just to be sure that everybody understood what they were and getting into measurable skills gain and the denominator and the numerator and how all of that that worked. We have a link back to TAC 17-01 on row 20, which tells us a lot more detail about the way the measure is calculated, and then we get into a section where we're talking about the different types of measurable skills gains. So we have the measurable skills gains based on educational functioning levels, based on secondary achievement, whether in the form of a transcript, report card, or through awarding of a secondary school diploma or equivalent.

We've got the postsecondary transcript and report card, the training milestone skills progression. Those are basically just ways to figure out where your numerator is coming from and that will be obvious when we jump onto the dashboard. The idea is these are all different ways that states may be reporting different types of gains, and seeing how your gains line up may help you better understand, you know, where it is coming from, where your performance is or is not coming from. And then lastly, we had some information about the numbers of the participants that were in various types of activities, so those that were in the college category or the training category, they were enrolled in secondary education or postsecondary. And the last one, enrolled in training program leading to credential. As you’ll see, when we get to the dashboard where, basically, all of this stuff comes into play, and so I'm just going to go ahead and jump over to the measurable skills gain overview dashboard and walk us through what that looks like.

So to start with here, I wanted to go ahead and point out that at the top, in cells A5-A8, you can select up to four different entities. So we can go through here and look at the -- sorry, I'm going to try to make this more relevant to the data on the page. What I'm selecting is the weighted average for the national Combined, the weighted average for the Total, Texas and Colorado. And the reason I kind of picked these was if I was going to use my state, Texas, as a comparative point, then I would be interested in seeing what the numbers look like for the national Combined, how does Texas do relative to that? I picked Colorado because it is another state that is a Combined state, but I could have easily picked California or even if I wanted to pick one of the individual state totals. So, like here, I’ve just selected California and now you can see that the tables that starts on row 19 and the chart underneath it all change to match. So the reason that these -- that we were able to make these accessible is by ensuring none of the data displayed in the chart is data that’s not contained in the table above it. The tables, in fact, have a little more information in them. They have numerators and denominators for PY17 and PY18 and not just the rate. In the graphic charts, we were just showing the rate, but in the table, we went ahead and added in the numerator and the denominator. Now, we could have done it in different ways to try to, you know, show everything, but the reality is that sometimes less is more, right? If you have too many bars and too many lines and there are too many different things that you're trying to combine on the same chart, sometimes it just kind of gets lost.

This first one, this first set of data we're looking at here starting on row 19 was the percent of participants served in the program year, 17 or 18, who were in education or training program that was leading to a recognized credential or employment. So for the most part, the numerator for this measure is roughly what you would expect to see as the denominator for the actual measurable skills gain, right? Because we don't put people in the measurable skills gain denominator if they are not in some kind of educational or training activity that is intended to result in credential or employment.

So, looking at this, you can see, for instance, for the Combined agencies, nationally, that 22.4% of the people, participants served in PY17 were in the measurable skills gain denominator, meaning they were in some kind of training or education activity. That increased slightly up to 27.8% for the states that operate separately Blind and General, the numbers were 21.5% versus 23%, so a little bit of improvement there as well. You can see that Texas improved a lot, and I will tell you it is not because we're doing anything right. It's that we finally got the automated system adjusted to be able to calculate this thing really well. So this is one of those instances where sometimes what you're seeing is not the result of efforts on the ground, so much as efforts behind the scenes. Ideally, with more mature systems, these types of big spikes will stop being related to automation and better reporting and will be related more to the way the program is operating and the success it is achieving.

So the second table, beginning on line 25, are the actual measurable skills gain results and so you can see, again, numerators and denominators for the measurable skills gain rates for PY17 and 18, and the chart shows just the performance for 17 and 18, and generally speaking, at least for the national Combined and the national Total states, either slight or reasonably solid improvement across the two years. Once again, Texas, because we made a few automated system changes before the end of the year, we were able to get our number with that, but we're still not feeling really satisfied with where we are, and that is part of the reason why I picked on myself and my state. It is not that I think we're doing a bad job or whatever. It is just that if we are going to have a compare and contrast, it is probably nicer to you all if I don't call anybody out.

Now, we start to break out the types of gains. So, on line 31, we're looking at the percent of the gains from each of the five categories in which gains can be reported. So you can see here that no matter how you look at it, whether you're looking at national or Texas or whatever, the EFL gain area is pretty small, right? We don't have a lot of stuff going on there, not a lot of numerator coming from the use of the pre- and post-testing and that kind of thing. Where we are seeing a lot more of our gains, and this is for everybody, is in the secondary school progress and the postsecondary progress, and you might look at some of these numbers and say, wait a minute, if I add up across this, if I add up 44.4% for Texas for the secondary school to 66.7% for postsecondary gains in Texas, that is over 100%. How are you getting there? The answer is you can have multiple types of gains during the year. Although this is duplicating individuals with gains from a denominator perspective, it is counting each person who had a gain in each category for displaying the results here.

As we go to the right, further in this data, we see that the gains from meeting a training milestone or from skills progression are also relatively low. Although, school skills progression is mostly in the double digits, whereas the training milestone piece is still very, very low. That's for PY17. Now, compare and contrast that with PY18, which begins on line 17. So by looking at these two charts together, you can really see shifts in some of the numbers. So, for instance, we're still seeing very low numbers in the percent of gains from EFLs and we're seeing solid gains in secondary, solid gains in postsecondary, and, again, relatively small numbers when it comes to training and skills progression. Here, once again, I'm going to point out something about that we were doing in our coding is that we discovered that our PY17 coding might have been picking up some postsecondary educational results and reporting them there rather -- I'm sorry, secondary school results, and possibly reporting them in the wrong category so that explains kind of some of that big difference in the number from one year to the next.

But as Bill was talking about, it is not all about percentages. It’s also about the numbers themselves. And so what the next two charts do, beginning on line 43, we have PY17 where we are breaking out the numbers of gains by type, but here we are doing numbers instead of percentages. So when you see these numbers here, suddenly some of the big swings from one year to the next can make a lot of sense, right? Because if you only had a dozen or a couple of dozen cases in a category, then guess what -- the next year, if that goes up to several hundred people, then everything can look completely different, and that's, in fact, kind of what we saw in a few areas when we look at the data state by state.

So then, line 49, is just the PY18 data. It is the same thing. It is the number of gains coming by participant in each of the five areas. So that’s the main dashboard where, you know, we kind of thought states would spend time, you know, exploring themselves. It could be that you have particular states that you think your programs are similar to, and I don't just mean Blind versus General or whatnot, I mean maybe there are similar complexities in geography between urban and rural, maybe there are similar dollars in terms of the program size. Maybe there are similar numbers of people being served. I mean, there are a variety of ways to select states to look at and try to understand and kind of benchmark against, and this can kind of help you get there.

Now, the reality is, if you want to look at all of the data, it is on those last two tabs. You can see 79 rows or whatever it is of all the different state results, but that is kind of messy. That doesn't let you bring things into focus and let you ask questions particularly well. You have to write a bunch of code for -- you know, a bunch of if/then type of statements and look for counts and standard deviations and all that other good stuff.

So, I'm going to take you through the next couple of tabs. They are all almost identical. This first one is taking the PY18 measurable skills gains rates reported by each state and for Combined agencies, so this chart only has the VR Combined states on it. I rate it from low to high, not to call anybody out, but honestly, if you want to try to understand the relative distribution of results, this is a particularly effective way of doing that. I also added in here, the weighted average national Combined rate, so basically, there is a line in the middle of the page. Lower of the two lines tells you where this overall group of states was on a weighted average and then the line above that is showing us the overall national number, so this is for all of the VR agencies, whether Blind, Combined, or General, and all of the weighted results for.

And so, there -- I want to be really clear, being above or below the line in and of itself is not indicative of doing really well or really poorly. And what I mean by that is, there are all kinds of differences in the people that we serve and the conditions under which we serve them. That is why WIOA requires the development of statistical models to try to account for this when we get into doing negotiations and evaluating our results, and ultimately, the models that are being built are going to be really powerful for that, but until they are ready, in the meantime, this type of descriptive data can make you ask questions about what is happening in your area. Do we maybe have a data issue? Do we have an education issue in terms of making sure the counselors understand when and where are they supposed to code things? Do we have reports available to the people in the field so they know who will be in measurable skills gain denominator so they can calendar it for some kind of follow-up or to test? I mean, you remember on the earlier chart, we showed how much measurable skills gain comes from education in postsecondary and secondary transcripts? Well, those are going to be probably in the December period, right, each year. And then you're probably going to see them again in May or June depending on how your state operates, so from a strategic standpoint, if you see that most of your gains come from there and it appears that that’s where most of your people are when it comes to training or education, building a process that focuses a little bit more on that type of period would make a lot of sense. So that you're basically not calling people in August to ask them for their report card, right? They will be looking at you like you're crazy: “I just started classes last week.”

OK, so we have one of these for every one of the different groupings. The next one over, these are the results for the Blind agencies, so PY18 results, again, we've got the national weighted average for these states and then we have the overall national number. Now, one thing that was interesting about this to me is that on average, the national Blind agencies had slightly better results than the nation as a whole, right? You can see that in this instance -- and I really need to tweak this chart to put markers on it so it is not just color-based -- but you can see that the national number is 23.4% and the national for Blind, national weighted average was 28.5. I forgot to point out that on all these charts, in order to make sure they were accessible for people, we put a table at the top. So the table at the top on lines three and four, those are the very data that drive the chart below. So now we’ve got our General agencies and the General agencies are -- let me go back. Blind agencies tended to group a little bit higher than the overall national average. If you look at these, the number of Blind agencies with results higher than national averages is more. It is close to two-thirds of them, right? When we go over to the General, it is not quite as big a difference, although the range from the lowest reporting -- and notice I use the term “lowest reporting” not lowest performing, because we don't know to what degree some of these numbers are the results of data or reporting issues as opposed to performing issues. But, again, you can see here a different type of curve. And then the last one is where we combine Blind and General together into the total results, and so you can see what these numbers look like.

Briefly, this is the data tab that is kind of driving everything. It is very messy. It is not easy to work your way through, but it is really useful data, and I was really thrilled that RSA was able to pull it together for us to use as a basis for this tool.

The last tab is the one that breaks out the different types of education and training categories -- misspelling education, good job, Adam. The different types of education and training programs that people are enrolled in, so essentially, this is telling us to some degree why people might be in the denominator for a measurable skills gain in a given year, so you can tell whether it is a result of college or training or secondary education, etc. They are all based on different data elements in the RSA-911 and that is one thing I forgot to mention. On the glossary tab, not only did we define the thing in plain language -- so we have a term like “Training Category (all types)”, line 27 here. We describe that as count of participants in any kind of during training during the PY. These training programs may or may not lead to a recognized credential or employment. For example, if the participant was enrolled in occupational and vocational training that leads to a credential, the participant should also be reported 85 and they should be included in measurable skills, so we have got some detail here. But to the right, the third column C, this is how we calculated -- or I should say, this is how RSA calculated it because they are the one who have access to all of RSA-911s, so this is the way that did all their counts that drove these last two tabs that we used for the -- to develop the dashboard. So, I think that is everything I was supposed to demo and I know now the other members of the WorkGroup are going to jump in and talk a little bit about some of the things they have been playing around with this in the period since we were developing it and see whether that leads to any questions.

**Rachel Anderson:** Thank you so much, Adam. I really appreciate it and it is fun hearing you, who is a data person, talk about what this is and what it isn't because I know a lot of states are learning that. Thank you so much for your explanation and we will get back to the presentation. There were no questions at this point that we couldn't answer, so we will see if there are any at the end and keep you posted.

**Adam Leonard:** Cool.

**Rachel Anderson:** Now, we're going to turn into, like Adam said -- we wanted to have the opportunity for other members of the WorkGroup talk about how they want to use this tool. Obviously, you saw, you know, the way that Adam showed how it is built, how you can play around with it. You can compare yourself, what it says, what it might not say, but we wanted the RehabData WorkGroup members to show you how they are going to use the information in their own states. We’ve got a couple of questions they are going to answer for you today, so we're asking the WorkGroup members, in your opinion, what value does this tool provide to state VR agencies? How do you intend to use the tool in your program or state? What additional tools and approaches are you using in your program or state to analyze VR program data? I'm going to have Natasha from Minnesota Blind go first. Natasha?

**Natasha Jerde:** Hi, everyone. I'm Natasha Jerde and I'm the Director of Minnesota Blind and I do want to just say, I’m a program person. I come from the program side. I just have a really deep love and appreciation for data and my whole motive is I want data for everyone. I want our VR counselors, case aides, anyone who supports the VR program to be able to look at this information and know what it is, know what it says, and act on it. For me, this tool was brilliantly laid out because I could understand it. And I think that our counselors and case aides, they could all look at that and say, OK, I know how we're doing in comparison and I know we have a ways to go. It is going to be great for helping us determine our targets for PY20 and 21 for measurable skill gains. Finally, now I know who I can connect with for other states. I was eyeing up Vermont Blind, and I'm, like, yeah, I’m going to be talking to you next because you seem to have MSG down to a science.

For usage, I already had shared this tool with our VR program staff and managers to point out that they are doing amazing. We doubled our MSG rate. But also to show we have ways to go, and I'm highly competitive, so I'm hoping next year, Minnesota Blind will be closer to the higher end, so it is really motivating me to figure out training and solve any reporting issues I know we are facing.

Finally, for additional tools, we have done a lot of qualitative looking at measurable skill gains. We have a targeted case review that pulls our measurable skill gains, things that are missing. We're looking at documentation and data validation and making sure that, yes, we're reporting 14 MSGs, but do we have the grades or diplomas to back it up?

Thanks, everyone.

**Rachel Anderson:** Thanks, Natasha. OK, next, we're going to have Scott Dennis from Maryland. Do you want to share your insights?

**Scott Dennis:** Yes, good afternoon, everyone. I'm Scott Dennis. I’m the Director of Maryland Combined. To give you a little bit of my background, I, for a number of years, was the Director of Administration and Financial Services for the agency. So for me, data and analytics has always been a part of a lot of what I use to manage sort of the administrative side of the business that we’re operating. So for me, having data is vitally important to try to track where we are as an agency and areas of improvement. When we look at this information, especially as we start to come up on our negotiation, it is vitally important to see where we have gaps, either in reporting, in backend information, maybe our settings aren't set the way they are supposed to be set, and so forth. I’ve kind of focused on some of the information that Chris brought up in Jacksonville this past fall, when he said, take a look at the number of people that are reporting -- supporting individuals in colleges and postsecondary, and look at the number of people with measurable skills gain coming from that, and we all saw there is a big gap. We started digging into that and we found that we’ve got some decent gaps there and we're supporting people, but we're not getting information into the system. So we're looking at several things -- one, we have done training on measurable skills gains, so now we're going to go back and take a look at it. Was our training clear and concise? Were there things that we missed in our training? We have a high level of turnover in our staff, so we realize we are going to have to go back and retrain those new staff people as well.

Also taking a look at our policies and procedures, making sure that, again, we’ve clearly articulated what needs to be done, what check boxes need to be filled in, and so forth, so it takes some of the pressure off of the counselors. The other thing is -- and Adam brought them up -- data lags. We require, in particular for postsecondary, if we are providing those -- paying for the services, you have to provide your grades or transcripts that indicate that you’ve made progress in that previous semester before we'll pay for the next semester coming up. We're noticing that we're getting that information well after the fact, and so, you know, in particular for the spring semesters, if we're not getting the information until August, well, we just missed an opportunity to get that information and record it in the previous performance year.

Again, one of the things that we have done this past year is use measurable skills gains as a performance measure for our counselors, and so we'll be using this as a guide in how do we set -- go about setting measures for our counselors. Obviously, it provides us good information, allows us to drill down on the information, and really look, kind of dig into that, so before we start setting performance standards for our counselors. For me personally, when we take a look at this, how am I performing against other states? Realistically, I'm taking a look at states with similar situations that we are in. I'm taking a look at case sizes, order of selection and so forth and kind of seeing how do we look compared to those organizations and maybe if there is -- if we're performing below certain states, again, reaching out, phoning a friend and finding out what they are doing that we might be able to incorporate what we do here in Maryland.

Also, talking about other things and comparing data and so forth, again, using the 911 and going to my A2 and comparing the data to see whether or not I’ve got, hopefully, similar information. If I'm not, I’m kind of making some of the adjustments and finding out why I have a discrepancy here versus there. As far as one of the things that was part of our quality assurance is we do – we’ve added this as one of the measures to make sure that we've got, when we are doing the case reviews, that we’ve got those measurable skills gains documentation in the file, so we can make sure we're reporting correctly.

We have gone through and removed measurable skill gains that have been checked off and entered into our cases and because we can't find or don't feel comfortable with the documentation, we have removed those from our filing, because we want to make sure that we're reporting that information accurately. So that’s what we're doing here in Maryland.

**Rachel Anderson:** Thanks, Scott. I know we have a couple of follow-up questions coming in for you guys so far, but we'll get to those if we have time. Next, I wanted to have Kristen from Arizona give her thoughts on this.

Kristen, are you with us?

**Kristen Mackey:** Yes, I'm un-muted now. Can you hear me?

**Rachel Anderson:** Yes, thank you.

**Kristen Mackey:** Perfect, thanks. I am the director of Arizona Combined and, similar to Natasha, I started as a VR counselor and really program-oriented, but do call myself a data nerd because I enjoy seeing where things come from and really, that’s the -- in my opinion, that is the value of this, we can see the numbers in the data as it is reflected across, you know, all of the states. I think it is a great opportunity for baselining and for comparative value and the big thing that I feel is super beneficial is the basic definitions and the data elements. So, from our perspective, I know it is out there, but to have it in one place and very targeted to this particular measure is very beneficial, in my opinion. What we're planning to do here in Arizona is also then link this directly to our case management system, so we're in the system. What is the screen shot of that data element? What are the requirements? Did you go back and check this other data element that needs to be entered in in order for this data element to be captured and be correct? Those are pieces that, as we look through our data, we're missing, not putting in all of the information that we need in order to appropriately capture the data that we need.

We will be sharing it with our staff and asking them to take a look at that and I really value the idea of the transparency, and Adam said it several times. We all did. It’s not a who is doing better or worse, and how do we -- it is not about that. It is about where we are as a nation serving people, how are we serving people and how can we do better? So additionally, how to use this in the future to help us analyze our VR program data is really talking about where do we start? The impact and urgency of certain levels, so you can see the EFL gains and the training milestones are maybe not the first ones we want to hit because the numbers are a little smaller. We may want to target the percent of gains from secondary and postsecondary. Is that the area that we can make the biggest gains and focus in first and then move towards the others? So those will be conversations that we have as a state team to decide how to best tackle and appropriately get the right data in there with the appropriate documentation as well.

**Rachel Anderson:** Thanks, Kristen. OK, Bill Colombo, do you have any final thoughts you want to add?

**Bill Colombo:** Yes, absolutely. Thanks so much. Just in summary, I wanted to add a couple different points. So really, I think everyone has mentioned the value of the data in terms of identifying reporting gaps, lags that have impact. There are components that have significant value for policies and procedures to ensure that they have been developed in a manner that will meet MSG requirements. Training was mentioned, and/or retraining after identifying the fact there may be lags and that may be a result of some type of missing component relative to training. Internal controls and case review, that was another thing that was mentioned that has value relative to the use of the tool. I think it really is going to help guide setting performance goals at all levels, in our bureau, from state level right on down to the counselor level. Obviously, it will help when negotiating with RSA in coming months. It really is a nice opportunity to explore best practices as well to identify those states that are doing well, and those are green flags, so to engage in conversation, communication about what is going right and can we glean some helpful nuggets as a result of those conversations that will benefit our customers in Michigan.

I think that the other thing, it points out opportunities for partnering just by looking at the type of gains. That is going to drive conversation at the state level for us here in Michigan as well. In looking at the data over time, hopefully, the data will become cleaner, the data validation process will work its way out, and 19 will show greater improvements over 17 and 18 relative to the validity of the data that’s being collected. For us, it is an opportunity to make this very real at every level of the bureau. We have already engaged in training and retraining our staff knowing that this indicator is going to be measured over the course of the next two program years, and I think the other thing that we are doing just to build on this is to embrace the use of other business intelligence software. We are fortunate enough to have Tableau in the state of Michigan, still developing our expertise, but it has the same type of utility and application in terms of providing visualizations of really complex data sets, so we're very excited about that. So, thanks, Rachel.

**Rachel Anderson:** Yep, thanks, Bill. OK, as we're wrapping up today, I did want to share -- we have gotten questions about if this tool is going to be available. What about the PowerPoint? Hopefully, all of you saw the PowerPoint get posted in the chat. You should have access to that now so you can actually have access to these links. But the MSG tool actually has been sent out. It was sent as an attachment in the e-mail that came out from RSA announcing this webinar and announcing the tool, so you should have that. It is also posted on the WINTAC website. So we added some links here for you so you will have direct access to the tool and to any of the trainings that we post as well. We did record this webinar. We will get it posted within the next few days and have it living on the WINTAC site, so you can share this with your staff, you can watch it again if you're new to looking at data, and we can all kind of grow and learn together and use MSG as a platform to do that. Chris, do you want to go over upcoming projects and activities and let everyone know what’s next?

**Christopher Pope:** Yeah, sure thing. Thank you, Rachel. Where do we go from here? Bill hinted at it earlier in his comments about why and how we put these tools together. But we have a couple more data tools planned. In February, we're hoping to provide a data tool related to employment at exit and employment post-exit, sharing VR performance related to those metrics, and in March, we're hoping to release a data tool related to pre-employment transition services that VR agencies provide to students with disabilities, so be on the lookout for those additional deliverables in the next couple of months leading up to the spring conferences in April here in D.C.

The other thing I wanted to let everyone know is we're going to get together in person. The RehabData WorkGroup is meeting at the RSA offices here in D.C. later this month, where we're going to tackle another one of the charges of the WorkGroup, and that is establishing a set of measures that matter to the VR program that are different from those WIOA common performance measures, the measures that we think have value in assessing the program and highlighting the good work that VR agencies do each and every day. We're also going to spend time in our in-person meeting looking at RSA's quarterly data dashboards and sort of fine-tuning them and prototyping some new ways of sharing data. As you know, we have shared several quarters of that and we have made a commitment to kind of keep those fresh and interesting, so we are going to rely on this WorkGroup’s expertise to help us get there.

We're hoping to have time at the CSAVR and NCSAB spring conferences to highlight our deliverables from January, February, and March to talk about those performance measures that we identified as important, but most importantly, get feedback from you and from stakeholders across the country, so we really encourage you to reach out to me, to anyone on the WorkGroup before, during, and after these events to let us know what you think to give us some ideas of what you also think could be helpful or valuable.

Lastly, I want to thank everyone for joining us this afternoon and really give a shout-out to the members of the RehabData WorkGroup, who have really done some phenomenal work here, and we certainly appreciate it.

**Rachel Anderson:** Thanks, Chris. We don't have time to answer any questions today. There were a few in the chat, so I will be reaching out to you directly to see if we can follow up on those, but we appreciate you all joining us, and Adam, do you have any final comments before we end the webinar?

**Adam Leonard:** I just wanted to take a minute to echo something that Chris was saying about looking for measures that we think may help better evaluate the VR program or tell the story of all the things it is able to do. Some of you may not know this, but you know those measures that are in WIOA? Do you know where they came from? There was a work group in 2004 that came up with them and it was basically the only consensus that could be reached between the education agencies and the labor agencies, and then those ideas just basically got carried forward year after year after year as WIOA reauthorization bills went through and didn't pass. And so here we are in 2014 and the law passes and they take these original ideas from 10 years ago. I know that everybody's best idea today could be improved in a couple of weeks, right, so from my perspective, as a guy who does nothing but live in data, for all of the WIOA programs, not just VR, I'm really -- I'm spending a lot of time working on these questions of measures not just for VR, but more broad measures that might be used in other programs as well, because ultimately, WIOA is going to have to be reauthorized at some point and I’m really hoping that by working with communities with RSA, with OCTAE -- I’m on their work groups -- with DOL -- I'm on all their work groups -- that we can get people together around the set of new ideas that might improve some of the weaknesses that the current measures have. There are some good ideas in the current measures. I don't mean to suggest that they are all poor. I'm saying, gosh, it would have been nice to have had a chance to try to make tweaks before they went into law and maybe, if there is some consensus out there amongst the – four of the core title partners, we might be able to -- and our communities like CSAVR and NASWA for the Labor programs, maybe there will be an opportunity for us to actually influence what the next bill looks like.

**Rachel Anderson:** OK, thank you so much. We're a few minutes over, so we are going to end there. Like I said, this will be posted on the WINTAC website. We appreciate you all joining us. Have a good day.