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File created 9/7/2012. This is not the final version of record. The following article was published in the *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 79, 17-24.

Employer Attitudes towards Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired:  
Perspectives and Recommendations from Vocational Rehabilitation Personnel

Michele Capella McDonnall, Li Zhou, and Adele Crudden

The National Research & Training Center on Blindness & Low Vision, Mississippi State, MS

Acknowledgments:

<sup>1</sup>The contents of this article were developed under a grant from the Department of Education, NIDRR grant H133B100022. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and should not indicate endorsement by the Federal Government.

<sup>2</sup>We would like to thank Ms. Kathleen West-Evans, Director of Business Relations for CSAVR, for her assistance on this research project and her helpful comments on this article.

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

### Abstract

This study investigated vocational rehabilitation service providers' opinions about employer attitudes towards people who are visually impaired and what they had found to be the best techniques to encourage an employer to consider these people for employment. We found that rehabilitation counselors tended to have more negative perceptions of employers' attitudes toward hiring persons who are visually impaired than providers who identified themselves as business relations staff. Business relations staff were more likely to approach potential employers from a perspective that focused on employer needs and consumer abilities. Twelve themes of techniques to work with employers were identified and then further grouped into two broader categories: *providing information* and *service delivery strategies*.

*Keywords:* visual impairment, vocational rehabilitation, employment, employers

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

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In almost any culture, the importance of employment to quality of life is recognized. Low levels of employment for people who are blind or have low vision (i.e., with a visual impairment) is an ongoing problem. Recent national data from the Current Population Survey illustrate the severity of the problem: in 2011, 31.3% of individuals with a visual impairment ages 16 to 64 were employed compared to 67.0% without a visual impairment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). In addition, persons with a visual impairment have a much higher unemployment rate compared to the general population (17.1% vs. 9.0%).

Negative employer attitudes are generally thought to be one of the reasons that persons with disabilities have consistently had low levels of employment, and employer attitudes are considered one of the major barriers to successful employment for persons with a visual impairment (Crudden & McBroom, 1999; Crudden, Williams, McBroom, & Moore, 2002; Kirchner, Johnson, & Harkins, 1997; Salomone & Paige, 1984). Research also indicates that employers believe it would be very difficult to hire a person who is blind for specific positions they most frequently fill; they consider it more difficult to hire a person who is blind than a person with other disabilities, with the exception of moderate or severe mental retardation (Gilbride, Stensrud, Ehlers, Evans, & Peterson, 2000).

Addressing negative employer attitudes may be challenging, but one method to do this is with the interactions that state-federal vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies have with businesses. VR agencies have always interacted with employers in their efforts to assist persons who are visually impaired to obtain employment. Traditionally, these interactions have focused on job placement efforts, which generally involve placing one consumer in a specific job.

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

Recently, interactions focusing on establishing long-term relationships with employers have received increasing attention. Establishing relationships with businesses that can provide the potential to place a number of consumers with the same employer is believed to be a more effective way of helping consumers attain employment.

This concept has been discussed in the rehabilitation literature for more than 20 years, as a component of demand-side employment (e.g., Gilbride & Sensrud, 1999). Fifteen years ago an Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (IRI) report was devoted to the topic of developing effective partnerships with employers (Fry, 1997). Although it is not a new concept, there is an increasing emphasis for state-federal VR agencies to focus on business interactions; this concept is currently most often referred to as the business relations model or dual customer approach. Most agencies employ staff who are responsible for making connections with businesses, and in almost every agency rehabilitation counselors are also responsible for interacting with businesses (McDonnall, 2012).

Although state-federal VR agencies and their service providers are on the front line of facilitating employment of individuals who are visually impaired, only a few previous studies have examined effective strategies that VR service providers could use to overcome the barrier of employer's attitude towards this population. Employers in one study (Kirchner et al, 1997) identified the provision of federal or state tax credits for hiring persons with visual impairments and providing on-the-job training to consumers (paid by the VR agency) as effective strategies to encourage businesses to hire people with visual impairments. In another study, rehabilitation providers identified two primary methods of addressing employer attitudes: educating employers about visual impairment and increasing contact between employers and individuals with visual impairments; with the idea that the rehabilitation counselor should first try education, then move

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

to increasing contact once the employer was more comfortable (Crudden, Sansing, & Butler, 2005). In a study examining employer attitudes towards hiring and working with persons with visual impairments, focus groups of employers recommended strategies for rehabilitation providers., Their recommendations included maintaining ongoing contact with employers, recommending or providing assistive technology in a timely manner, and participating in trade shows to educate employers about assistive technology (Crudden et al., 2002).

A few studies have focused on strategies to improve employment outcomes for consumers with other disabilities and have included a focus on employers. For example, considering job placement for persons with the most severe disabilities, Mullins and colleagues interviewed exemplary VR counselors and found that they stressed employer outreach as one way to address negative attitudes of employers (Mullins, Roessler, Schriener, Brown & Bellini, 1997). Employer outreach strategies included informing employers about on-the-job accommodations and extra support needs in advance of placement, analyzing job demands, and matching qualified applicants with jobs. A study conducted in Australia focused on ways to develop relationships between VR agencies and employers (Buys & Rennie, 2001). The authors identified several factors that were important to building effective partnerships, including making financial incentives available to employers for hiring people with disabilities, treating the employer as a customer by identifying and meeting their needs, and achieving a high level of professional competence and responsiveness among agency staff in relation to client placement and follow-up.

Given the increased focus on business interactions by VR agencies, we undertook a study to investigate what agencies are doing in this area (. As part of this national project investigating the effectiveness of existing practices used by VR agencies to interact with employers, VR

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

personnel provided their opinions of what the best technique(s) are to encourage an employer to consider a consumer who is blind or visually impaired for employment. This data, in addition to their opinions about employers' attitudes towards hiring people with visual impairments, were examined in this study.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

This study was part of a larger research project investigating VR agencies' business interaction practices. Staff from all VR agencies in the United States, including the 50 states and Washington D.C., that serve the majority of consumers with visual impairments (i.e., combined agencies and blind agencies) were asked to participate. Within each agency, staff in positions whose focus was interaction with businesses (referred to as business relation consultants, employment specialists, job placement specialists, etc.) and rehabilitation counselors responsible for interactions with businesses were asked to complete the survey. The survey was administered online, with a request to complete it sent by email to appropriate VR staff. The request was distributed to CSAVR National Employment Team points of contact within each agency and was also distributed by VR agency directors to their staff. A total of 245 people responded to the survey, with 210 providing responses to the items presented in this study. Respondents represented 41 agencies: 20 blind agencies and 21 combined agencies. Because we were not solely responsible for distributing the survey and responses were anonymous, it is not possible to report a response rate.

#### **Questionnaire**

A survey questionnaire was developed to determine the activities and opinions of VR service providers regarding interactions with businesses. The focus of the present study was on

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

participants' perceptions of employer attitudes towards consumers who are visually impaired, and their opinions regarding the best ways to encourage an employer to consider these consumers. Also of interest was whether participant responses differed based on their type of position (e.g., business relations staff versus rehabilitation counselors) or the type of consumer served (i.e., persons with visual impairments primarily, or persons with all disabilities [including persons with visual impairments]). Participants' responses to the following questions are reported:

1. In your opinion, do businesses/employers have more negative attitudes towards hiring someone who is blind or visually impaired compared to someone with another type of disability?
2. In your experience, approximately what percentage of businesses/employers initially have negative attitudes about hiring someone who is blind or visually impaired?
3. What have you found to be the best technique(s) to encourage an employer/business to consider a consumer who is blind or visually impaired for employment?

### **Data Analyses**

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the first two questions, and potential differences in responses based on type of position were evaluated with chi-square and ANOVA. Conventional content analysis was used to analyze participants' open-ended responses to question 3 (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Specifically, two researchers reviewed all participants' responses and independently identified themes emerging from the data. Independent themes were similar, and a preliminary codebook (i.e., definitions of themes) was then developed through a discussion between the first and second authors. Using the preliminary codebook, the two authors independently coded all responses; initial inter-coder agreement was low (36.6%).



## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

To improve agreement, the authors clarified and refined the preliminary codebook. Using the new codebook, the two authors independently recoded the responses again and achieved agreement on 86.3% of all responses. The authors discussed the remaining 13.7% of responses that they did not reach independent agreement on to come to a consensus on how these responses would be coded.

### **Results**

Two hundred and ten participants from 41 agencies provided responses to the first two items; 183 of these provided substantive answers to the question about the best techniques to encourage employers to consider individuals with visual impairments. Among them, 115 (55.8%) were rehabilitation counselors, 74 (35.9%) were business relations staff (e.g., business relation consultants, business outreach specialists, job developers, employment specialists, or other titles directly related to interaction with business), and 17 (8.3%) were under other titles such as customer service specialists or administrators. Four participants did not provide their title. The majority of respondents were female (143, 68.1%). The length of participants serving in their current position ranged from 1 month to 25.9 years ( $M = 7.5$  years,  $SD = 6.8$ ). Twenty eight (13.3%) reported having visual impairments. The majority of participants (136, 64.8%) primarily served consumers with visual impairments, and 74 (35.9%) served consumers with a variety of disabilities, including those with visual impairments. One hundred and one (48.1%) had an educational background in rehabilitation counseling, 38 (18.1%) in business or marketing, 18 (8.6%) in job placement or job development, and 84 (40%) in other areas such as education or sociology.

### **Question 1**

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

When asked whether businesses/employers had more negative attitudes towards hiring someone who is blind or visually impaired compared to someone with another type of disability, 163 participants (83.6%) answered yes, while 32 (16.4%) did not believe they do. Fifteen participants declined to answer this question. Responses differed significantly by position title [ $\chi^2 (2, N = 191) = 22.08, p < .01, \text{Cramer's } V = .34$ ], with rehabilitation counselors much more likely to indicate that employers had more negative attitudes. Responses also differed significantly based on type of consumer served [ $\chi^2 (1, N = 194) = 10.97, p < .01, \text{Cramer's } V = .24$ ], with those serving primarily consumers with visual impairments more likely to indicate employers had more negative attitudes (see Table 1).

An additional multivariate analysis was conducted to determine which variable (position title or type of consumer served) was more closely associated with perceptions of negative employer attitudes. This was considered important, as an interaction between the two variables was noted (i.e., people in business relation positions were more likely to serve consumers with all disabilities). Logistic regression was used to evaluate the relative ability of each variable to predict perceptions of employers' negative attitudes. The overall model was significant, but only position title was found to be a significant predictor in the model [ $\chi^2 (2, N = 190) = 11.80, p < .01, \text{Odds Ratio} = 6.25$  (for rehabilitation counselors versus business relations staff)].

### **Question 2**

When asked to estimate the percentage of businesses/employers that initially had negative attitudes about hiring someone who is blind or visually impaired (with options presented as a 5-point incremented scale; e.g., 0, 5, 10, 15, 20%), the mean response was 55.17 ( $SD = 30.06$ ). The median response was 60%, and the mode, or most common response, was 75% ( $n = 30$ ), followed by 50% ( $n = 21$ ) and 90% ( $n = 20$ ). When comparing responses across

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

all three position types, the difference was not statistically significant [ $F(2, 203) = 2.85, p = .06$ ].

However, when evaluating the difference between business relations staff and rehabilitation counselors, this difference was statistically significant [ $F(1, 187) = 5.59, p = .02, d = .35$ ].

Business relations staff estimated that a lower percentage of employers had a negative attitude towards people who are blind or visually impaired, compared to rehabilitation counselors (see Table 1).

When comparing responses across consumer type served, professionals who served primarily consumers who are blind or visually impaired estimated a significantly higher percentage of employers had a negative attitude compared to professionals who served consumers with all types of disabilities [ $F(1, 207) = 4.60, p = .03, d = .31$ ]. However, when both variables were combined in a multivariate analysis, the overall model was not significant [ $F(3, 185) = 2.24, p = .09$ ], and consumer type was clearly not related to the employer percentage with negative attitudes estimate [ $F(1, 187) = 0.09, p = .76$ ].

### Question 3

Analyses generated twelve themes that were then grouped into two categories, recognizing that there can be overlap among categories. Category 1, *Providing Information*, included seven themes and Category 2, *Service Delivery Strategies*, included five themes. The themes associated with each category are described in detail in the following sections. Of the 183 responses received to this question, 161 fit into one or more of the 12 themes. An additional 22 responses were not easily placed into specific themes with some bridging categories and others distinct from the two categories. See Table 2 for a summary of the data, ordered from most common response to least common.

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

**Providing information.** Of the 183 participants suggesting techniques to encourage employers to hire someone who is blind or visually impaired, 53 (29%) recommended providing information about accommodations and AT. Demonstration of how people who are blind or visually impaired perform a job, use AT, or function in general was mentioned by 25 (13.7%) persons; this demonstration is regarded as another means of conveying information to employers with one participant stating, “I believe I can tell them how great a client can benefit them, but seeing is believing.” Of the 25 respondents who mentioned demonstration, 11 emphasized demonstration of potential accommodations or AT. Demonstration could take multiple forms, including agency personnel demonstrating how to use AT or demonstrating how a person who is blind would complete a job task, having the employer tour another job site or an agency setting where a person who is visually impaired performs the job task, or asking a person who is visually impaired to perform a job task for an employer. One participant advocated “awareness presentations using blindfolds to demonstrate how the work could be done with accommodations.” Participant responses concerning exposing employers to blind people and using role models were also included in the Demonstration theme. Participants ( $n=17$ , 9.3%) recommended educating employers about disability and issues specific to visual impairments, including social/interpersonal issues concerned with working with someone with a visual disability (such as use of the word “see” or how much and when to offer assistance). Another type of information participants advocated sharing with employers concerns tax incentives for hiring persons with disabilities; 10 participants (5.5%) suggested this strategy.

Providing potential employers with success stories of persons who are visually impaired performing similar jobs was mentioned by 9.8% ( $n = 18$ ) of the participants. Direct communication among employers about working with someone who is blind or visually impaired

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

was proposed by 9 (4.9%) participants, who suggested connecting employers with other employers who had hired someone with a visual impairment.

Finally, open discussions with employers was recommended by 11 (6%) of the participants. These respondents advocated frank communication to discuss real concerns in a safe environment. Examples of responses included, "get them to talk about their objections or concerns and be prepared to overcome these with accurate information"; and "... be open and honest." One participant proposed "discussing stereotypes and fears they may be concerned about when considering an individual for employment that has a visual impairment. Address their concerns then demonstrate how to either reduce or eliminate those concerns."

**Service delivery strategies.** The importance of establishing ongoing relationships with employers and addressing employer needs was stressed by 25 (13.7%) of the respondents. Ensuring that the job applicant meets the employers' needs was cited by 34 (18.6%) respondents. A comment that incorporates both of these recommendations was, "try to uncover the employer's real needs and sell the candidate that can best meet the needs." Using a job analysis (to better understand the position) is one method participants recommended to be sure that a qualified candidate is referred to the employer. One participant stated, "focus on the position description and job duties and consider any candidate who, with or without accommodations, has the skill set necessary to succeed on the job. Know what the essential elements of the job entail, and make sure the consumer has the training, skills, competencies, and talents in these skill areas before competing for the job."

Respondents further advocated focusing on abilities rather than disabilities when working with employers ( $n = 29$ , 15.8%). Participants urged a positive focus, with one participant advising "not to dwell on their disability, but rather on their strengths and abilities to perform the

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

job"; and another, "focus on the employment skills of the individual – the disability is secondary." However, assuring employers that support from the VR agency, such as assistance with technology or job coaching, would continue to be available was also recommended by 25 participants (13.7%). For example, one respondent suggested: "Convey to the employer constant contact with both the employee and employer is maintained."

Using on-the-job training or other types of work experience, both paid and unpaid, was encouraged by 35 people (19.1%) and was the second most frequently cited technique. Participants noted that this strategy provides advantages to both employers and persons with visual impairments. Comments included, "many employers...are more open to doing internships or on the job training before committing to permanent employment" and "job shadowing and work experience allow the employer to see the consumer on the job before hiring." These experiences are also advocated because they provide opportunities for persons with visual impairments to "see how they do in a particular situation" and determine if a job is a good match for their skills and abilities.

**Comparisons based on position and type of consumer served.** Comparisons of comment counts by categories were made between participants who identified themselves as rehabilitation counselors and those who were business relations staff. No significant differences were found between the two groups in terms of participant's total number of comments made in category 1 [ $F(1, 164) = 1.25, p = .27$ ] or in category 2 [ $F(1, 164) = 1.08, p = .30$ ]. The same comparisons were also made between participants who served primarily consumers who are blind or visually impaired and those who served consumers with all types of disabilities. Results showed no significant difference in number of comments in either category 1 [ $F(1, 181) = 0.04, p = .84$ ] or in category 2 [ $F(1, 181) = 0.20, p = .65$ ]. This indicates that in each broad comment

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

category, opinion regarding effective strategies to work with employers was similar among participants with different position titles and types of consumer served. However, as illustrated in Table 2, there were some substantial differences in percentage of respondents recommending specific themes based on position title (e.g., establishing relationships with the businesses/ focusing on their needs) and consumer type served (e.g., using success stories).

**Differences based on agency.** To determine whether responses differed depending on where VR personnel were employed, we evaluated their qualitative responses by agency. Ten agencies had seven or more participants who provided a response to Question 3; the percentages of staff in those states that provided a comment under each theme were compared to percentages for all other respondents (i.e., the average percentage across all respondents, with staff from that specific state removed). Most of the responses did not differ substantially by agency, with a few exceptions. The most obvious example of differences in responses based on agency was related to the job training theme; in several agencies no one, or only one person, mentioned this technique, while in other agencies more than 43 to 45% of the participants mentioned it. Focusing on consumers' abilities was also particularly important for two agencies (43% of participants provided this response, compared to 15% for participants from other agencies), as was assurance of consumers' qualifications for one agency (57% of participants from this agency, compared to 17% of other participants). Use of demonstration was particularly important for two agencies: 24 to 25% of participants from these agencies, compared to 9 to 12% for other agencies' participants. It is interesting to note that no one from 5 of the 10 agencies mentioned demonstration as a best technique.

## Discussion

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

A key finding from this study is that the majority of VR personnel who participated believe that employers have more negative attitudes towards hiring someone who is blind or visually impaired, compared to someone with another type of disability. However, this belief was more prevalent among rehabilitation counselors than business relations staff. Although type of consumer served was significantly related to this belief, additional multivariate analyses illustrated that the primary difference came from position title; therefore, the discussion will focus on that variable. Analyses documented that the odds of believing that employers had more negative attitudes towards people who are blind or visually impaired were more than six times greater for rehabilitation counselors than business relations staff. This research does not document that employers are in fact more negative about hiring someone who is blind or visually impaired compared to someone with another type of disability; however, it does indicate that VR personnel, particularly rehabilitation counselors, anticipate greater employer resistance to hiring someone with a visual disability.

Overall, VR personnel believe that more than half of the employers they interact with initially have negative attitudes towards hiring people who are blind or visually impaired. Compared to business relations staff, rehabilitation counselors estimated a higher percentage of employers have initial negative attitudes. As with Question 1, type of consumer served was significantly related to responses to this question, but additional multivariate analyses illustrated that position title was the variable driving these differences.

One potential reason for the differences observed between rehabilitation counselors and business relations staff on these items could be differences in the way these groups approach and work with employers. Business relations staff are more likely to approach an employer from the employer's perspective as a business, focusing on developing a relationship, understanding the



## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

employer's needs, and helping that employer meet those needs, as illustrated by differences in responses to Question 3. Business relations staff were much more likely to suggest establishing a relationship and focusing on employer needs as a best technique. Another technique business relations staff were more likely to suggest was having an open discussion to address concerns or questions (which would be more likely to happen within the context of an established relationship). Business relations staff were also more likely to provide information about tax incentives and to recommend carefully matching applicants to employer needs, both strategies that demonstrate sensitivity to the potential financial and managerial aspects of hiring a person with a visual disability. Finally, business relations staff were slightly more likely to recommend focusing on consumer abilities, rather than disabilities. These findings support the idea that business relations staff tend to approach an employer differently than rehabilitation counselors do, focusing on the employer's perspective and establishing a relationship.

Although rehabilitation counselors and business relations staff differed in some areas on best techniques recommended, they were very similar in other areas. Four of the top five most recommended techniques were recommended by a similar percentage of these VR personnel. The most commonly recommended technique, providing information about accommodations and AT, was the same for both groups. A total of 64 respondents (35%) mentioned accommodations and/or AT (providing information or demonstration of them) as a best technique. It is perhaps not surprising that this was the most commonly mentioned technique, as accommodations and AT greatly enhance functional capabilities for individuals with visual impairments (Gerber, 2003). Given that blindness and visual impairment are low incidence disabilities, it is likely that most employers are not familiar with the accommodations and AT that are available to help employees with these conditions perform many typical job functions. Without this information,

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

employers may not be aware that people who are blind or visually impaired can effectively meet their job requirements. What many employers are most concerned about is whether a job candidate can contribute to their businesses, rather than his or her disabilities (Luecking, 2008). Given that a major concern of employers is whether a person with visual impairments can actually perform the work associated with a job (Wolffe & Candela, 2002), showing them that accommodations and technologies allow individuals with visual impairments to accomplish the work can be an effective technique, and also one that could change employers' attitudes about the capabilities of people who are blind or visually impaired.

Another technique mentioned by a large number of participants was utilizing on the job training or other work experiences to allow consumers who are blind or visually impaired an opportunity with an employer. This strategy demonstrates sensitivity to the employer's potential financial investment in hiring an employee. Interestingly, this technique was mentioned very frequently by VR personnel in some agencies (e.g., 43 to 45%), while it was not mentioned at all, or by only one person, in other agencies. This may indicate that it is considered very successful in those agencies that emphasize the use of the technique, while other agencies may not advocate its use. Research has documented that employers welcome on the job training or other work experiences paid for by the agency for persons who are visually impaired (Kirchner et al., 1997). The effectiveness of this strategy has also been supported in some rehabilitation outcome analyses with consumers with other disabilities (Arango-Lasprilla, Cardoso, Wilson, Romero, Chan, & Sung, 2011; Youngoh & Bellini, 2011). In addition to the opportunity for employers to observe job candidates with disabilities and for job candidates to learn and demonstrate job related skills, this strategy is also regarded as one important type of enticement to employers who

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

hire people with disabilities (Luecking, 2008). Because it is a strategy that benefits both employers and consumers, it merits consideration by agencies not utilizing it.

These results indicate that the strategies used to encourage employers to work with and employ persons with visual disabilities reported in previous research continue to be used effectively. However, which strategies are used may be influenced by the professional orientation of the service provider, with providers identifying themselves as business relations staff perceiving employers as less negative about employing persons with visual disabilities and business relations staff focusing more on employer needs.

### **Limitations**

The analysis of the narrative data has some limitations. When participants provided multiple effective strategies, these strategies were not listed in order of importance or effectiveness. Consequently, we do not know which strategy they regarded as “the most” effective, though we do report how often each strategy was reported. It appears that many VR service providers use an array of strategies and likely customize their approach based on their setting and situation; consequently there may not be one best strategy. Participants were asked to report their “best technique(s)” and some may use additional techniques that they did not list. Secondly, participants provided a list of strategies but did not describe them in detail. Strategies may be more distinctive or alike than this analysis reflects. Finally, this data reflect VR service providers' opinions based on their personal experiences, rather than providing empirical evidence to the effectiveness of the identified strategies.

### **Implications**

Given that a majority of VR personnel, both rehabilitation counselors and business relations staff, believe that employers have negative attitudes towards people with visual

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

impairments, it is important to consider how these perceptions may impact their interactions with businesses. Rehabilitation personnel assuming more negative attitudes from employers may be more apprehensive or even defensive in approaching potential employers, or may avoid employer contacts because they anticipate rejection. Perceptions about negative employer attitudes may be conveyed to consumers, thus influencing consumer behaviors toward and attitudes about both employers and employment.

Agencies identified their staff who are responsible for interactions with businesses, and those staff were asked to complete this survey. Agencies that have business relations or other personnel who work with employers may have an agency philosophy more compatible with the business relations or dual model approach. Regardless of agency philosophy, this research supports that VR personnel working with employers should establish relationships with employers and must have enough knowledge about blindness, job accommodations, and assistive technology used by persons who are blind to discuss these issues candidly with employers. Staff new to working with this population should be provided with adequate training to provide this knowledge. This is equally true for business relations staff as it is for rehabilitation counselors.

Rehabilitation administrators and service providers should assess the strategies listed here and consider how they might be used in their agencies. Given the large percentage of VR personnel in some agencies that report the effectiveness of utilizing on the job training or other forms of consumer work experiences, agencies who do not currently utilize this technique should consider it. Additional staff training may be necessary for implementation of specific strategies that are used infrequently or not at all. Rehabilitation counselors must also evaluate their own attitudes about employers and consider how those attitudes may impact interactions with employer and consumers.

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

Empirical research to gain additional information about employer attitudes is needed, as virtually no research has been conducted in this area. Of course, this type of research presents problems with socially desirable responding, as employers are presumably cautious about expressing negative attitudes and concerns about hiring persons with disabilities. Additionally, rehabilitation strategies regarding interactions with employers should be evaluated to determine which are most effective at achieving positive employment outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

Negative employer attitudes have long been considered a major barrier to employment for people who are blind or visually impaired. A potential avenue to address this barrier is the interactions that VR agency personnel have with employers. This study investigated VR service providers' opinions about employer attitudes towards people who are visually impaired and what they have found to be the best techniques to encourage an employer to consider these consumers for employment. Rehabilitation counselors tend to have more negative perceptions of employers' attitudes toward hiring persons who are blind or visually impaired than providers who identify themselves as business relations staff. Business relations staff are more likely to approach potential employers from a perspective that focuses on employer needs and consumer abilities.

Recommended methods to encourage employers to work with and hire persons with vision impairments include strategies focused on providing information and strategies focused around rehabilitation service delivery methods. Strategies reported to be effective by VR personnel include: using on the job training, matching consumers' skills to the potential job, focusing on consumers' abilities, assuring employers of ongoing support, establishing relationships with employers, and providing and demonstrating use of assistive technology and

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

assistive techniques. This research did not empirically evaluate which techniques actually result in better employment outcomes, and further research to address that issue is warranted.

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

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## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

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## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Questions 1 and 2*

Grouping Variable	Q1 <sup>a</sup>	Q1 <sup>a</sup>	Q2 <sup>b</sup>	Q2 <sup>b</sup>
	Total N	Percent “Yes”	Total N	Mean (SD)
<i>Position Title</i>				
Rehab counselors (RC)	109	93.6	116	59.35 (28.60)
Business relations staff (BRS)	66	66.7	73	48.78 (32.00)
Other	16	87.5	16	55.00 (26.40)
<i>Type of Consumer Served</i>				
Primarily B/VI	128	89.8	134	58.24 (28.52)
Including B/VI	66	71.2	71	48.97 (32.00)
<i>Position Title by Type of Consumer Served</i>				
RC, Primarily B/VI	93	92.5	99	59.44 (28.69)
RC, Including B/VI	17	100	17	60.29 (28.80)
BRS, Primarily B/VI	20	75.0	21	51.19 (30.08)
BRS, Including B/VI	45	62.2	52	47.02 (32.74)
Other, Primarily B/VI	13	92.3	14	56.79 (25.69)
Other, Including B/VI	2	50.0	2	27.50 (10.61)

<sup>a</sup>In your opinion, do businesses/employers have more negative attitudes towards hiring someone who is blind or visually impaired compared to someone with another type of disability?

<sup>b</sup>In your experience, approximately what percentage of businesses/employers initially have negative attitudes about hiring someone who is blind or visually impaired?

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

Table 2

*Themes emerging from Question 3*

Themes	Total	Position Title <sup>a</sup>		Type of Consumers Served	
		RC	BRS	Primarily B/VI	Including B/VI
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Provide information about accommodations and AT	53 (29.0%)	32 (30.5%)	19 (31.7%)	34 (27.9%)	19 (31.2%)
On the job training and work experiences	35 (19.1%)	25 (23.8%)	9 (15%)	27 (22.1%)	8 (13.1%)
Job applicant's qualifications	34 (18.6%)	18 (17.1%)	13 (21.7%)	19 (15.6%)	6 (9.8%)
Focusing on abilities instead of disabilities	29 (15.8%)	16 (15.2%)	12 (20%)	18 (14.8%)	11 (18.0%)
Assurance of supports to the business	25 (13.7%)	15 (14.3%)	9 (15%)	19 (15.6%)	6 (9.8%)
Establish relationship with business and focus on their needs	25 (13.7%)	6 (5.70%)	13 (21.7%)	17 (13.9%)	8 (13.1%)
Demonstration	25 (13.7%)	12 (11.4%)	5 (8.3%)	16 (13.1%)	7 (11.5%)
Using success stories	18 (9.8%)	9 (8.6%)	6 (10%)	15 (12.3%)	3 (4.9%)
Education about blindness (including disability awareness	17 (9.3%)	7 (6.7%)	8 (13.3%)	12 (9.8%)	5 (8.2%)

## EMPLOYER ATTITUDES

training)					
Open discussion to address concerns/questions	11 (6.0%)	4 (3.8%)	7 (11.7%)	6 (4.9%)	5 (8.2%)
Tax incentives	10 (5.5%)	3 (2.9%)	7 (11.7%)	5 (4.1%)	5 (8.2%)
Business-to-business referral	9 (4.9%)	7 (6.7%)	1 (1.7%)	7 (5.7%)	2 (3.3%)
Others	22 (12.0%)	13 (12.3%)	8 (13.3%)	13 (10.7%)	9 (14.8%)

<sup>a</sup> N's for Position Title do not add to the total as some respondents were in the "Other" category and four respondents did not provide their titles.