# TVR Institute Evaluation

# Summary of Graduate and Director Interviews

The Tribal Vocational Institute (TVRI) annual evaluation plan includes regular interviews with graduates of the Institute and with TVR Directors of their respective programs. This report summarizes the interviews with graduates during the during the 2016-17 academic year. Two directors of the programs employing the graduates were interviewed (since two of the graduates were promoted to the director position, there was no independent director to interview) and one who has a worker approaching graduation.

### Summary of Graduate Interviews

There were four graduates of the Institute. The evaluator conducted telephone interviews with each of the graduates in December 2017 and January 2018. The purpose of the interview was to learn more about their experience as students in the program and after their graduation. The interview also explored recommendations regarding the curriculum, instruction or follow-up course offerings or support. The interview guide is in the appendix to this report.

#### Course Experience

Overall, the graduates were very complementary of their courses, noting that all of them were helpful and informative. A couple of graduates said that all TVR staff, including office assistants, should take the courses. One explained that those who are new to TVR as well as those with experience can benefit from the program. The following statement illustrates the impact of the courses:

*All of them are very helpful. And like I said, they play a role into day-to-day [ work]. If I'm having a new experience that happens at work, and going back and [remembering], ‘Hey, that was covered in this section.’ And, ‘I remember this was what was discussed.’*

When asked if any courses were especially useful, two graduates noted the importance of the final course on project management. One appreciated learning more about financial issues covered in that course. The other graduates signaled out courses that covered the individual plan of employment (IPE) and job development. One explained that prior to the course she had struggled with IPEs, and another graduate appreciated learning how to customize employment to benefit his clients and prospective employers.

The graduates praised the quality of information and the experience of their instructors. The following statement is an example of graduates’ respect for their instructors:

*I believe that the people that were doing the instruction, they were professionals and had a lot of experience and a lot of knowledge in the area, and I felt very comfortable with them, I felt that they all knew what they were teaching and I felt really glad that I had these wonderful, knowledgeable instructors that gave us training online.*

They appreciated instructors who encouraged interaction during the class. One noted that: “*There were a couple of instructors that liked to catch us off guard. They'd talk a little bit and they would say, ‘Well what do you think, [name of student]?’”* There were some complaints, but students were able to deal with issues arising with an instructor. One graduate addressed her concern with the way one instructor made her feel when she asked a specific question. She was able to discuss her concern and, once resolved, found the course to be excellent. Another graduate appreciated the support and flexibility she experienced. She explained that when she had issues that made it difficult to meet assignment deadlines, she could ask for extra time to make up assignments. She noted that, “*And they were more than glad to help me be able to finish the courses and making sure that I knew what was going on in the classes. Making sure I was learning, not just pulling through the classes. So, it was really nice to have support from the instructors [and] that extra to make sure I completed the courses.”*

The graduates appreciated the use of discussion boards and assignments that required that they reply to two or more of their classmates’ postings. This design helped build camaraderie within the class. All the graduates appreciated being able to share issues they were facing and finding solutions through the experiences of their classmates. They also valued learning about the structure of different TVR programs. More than one graduate noted that they learned a lot from each other.

All the graduates attended a face-to-face course. Three attended classes at SeaTac in the Seattle area, and one attended the session in Spokane. They valued the experience to meet fellow classmates, network, and get immediate feedback from instructors. The discussions allowed for peer sharing and leaning. One student explained the value as follows, “*I think online experiences are okay, but you don't really ... you can't really put a face to someone's name. So, when you get to meet someone up close, you put a face to a name and some people are more visual. So, if they see a person it helps them to remember that person.”* Another explained getting feedback on his homework assignment. One graduate valued the review of her case file.

*I was able to take one of my case files and have them look at it. They showed me where my strengths were and pointed out the weaknesses and pointed out what I could do to improve the IPE. I had brought that back to the tribe after that face to face and made all the modifications to our IPE so that it meets the standard that we're to be going by.*

#### Suggestions for Additional Support or Follow-up Courses

The graduates had several suggestions for areas in which follow-up support or courses could be offered. One expressed a need for more information on regulations regarding allowable expenses. He finds information on allowable expenses often depends on who is providing information. For example, he wanted to pay a cultural performer at TVR conference he hosted. The advice he got was mixed. He explained his concerns as follows.

*It’s like sometimes the more you learn, the more questions you have. So, going back to the funding part, like I said, they told us what things that we could and couldn't spend money on. But the longer you've been in this program, this TVR program, you come across instances where there's a gray area there and you're not really sure. You don't want to spend the money and then find out it's not right. You shouldn't have done that. So, it would be better if they had more discussion on what you can and can't spend money on.*

Most of the graduates were interested in learning more about project management and the administrative process. One expressed interest in learning more about writing personnel policies. A couple mentioned more information on how to write an annual report or the TVR application. A graduate described this concern:

*I know there was one day in once class that we discussed the annual report. But, I think that maybe more than one day would be better for discussing that since it's such an important thing. Another thing that could be done, one thing that was never discussed as far as I know, was the application for the initial grant or even re-applying for the next five years of the grant.*

In addition to project management, graduates are interested in more attention to case writing and writing skills. Regarding case writing, a graduate commented that, “*I know that when we discussed case writing, it was kind of quickly done. I thought maybe they could have given more examples. I had already done case writing before I took this job. And, I already knew there was two different styles of case writing. But, I don't think everybody really knew that.*” Another explained that the reading helped her writing, but she would like more opportunity to work on writing skills. Another commented on the value of learning grant writing, “*I think grant writing would be really good because you know, we all need to know how it's done and even maybe we can even write grants for funding.*” *...*

One student would like more information on the IPE, noting that for some clients they can be unique. In addition to IPE, the student could use more information on ways to meet eligibility needs. One student noted that a textbook would be helpful and another recommended posting some of the class project products on the website.

#### Benefits of the Certificate to Graduates and TVR Programs

All the graduates described ways in which they have benefited from completing the certificate. Two have been promoted to a director position. One was given a temporary promotion when the director resigned owing to illness. After service for 90 days in a temporary role, she was assigned the position permanently. The other is in a rather new program and was promoted to the director role after completing the certificate. Another has put the certificate information into her resume. Although not actively seeking other positions, she knows that is has made her skills more marketable in her tribe and other programs in her area. One graduate is a job developer; however, he hopes the certificate may enable him to be promoted to a counselor when there is an opening in his program.

In addition to the personal benefits of the courses, all the graduates described ways in which their TVR program have benefited from their participation. They all shared information from their courses with their colleagues at staff meetings or in informal discussions. They described different ways they influenced changes in their work environment. Measures to ensure confidentiality improved in some programs. Two graduates work in office settings that have little room for private client conferences. They have developed policies with the TVR staff to ensure privacy for TVR interviews. In programs that share building space with other programs, the graduate developed a way to ensure that no children or youth would be on or near the premises when working with a client with a record of pedophilia. She also developed policies to meet with certain clients away from the office.

Three of graduates used information from the courses to improve their program’s policies including making changes in the IPE and other forms. Another graduate can fill in for absent workers now that he is familiar with rules governing intake and eligibility.

Graduates described final projects that they did for their classes that are now used in their TVR programs. One student developed materials to explain the purpose and role of the TVR program. She has used it to educate tribal managers and directors of other programs and presented it to the Tribal Council. She presented her Power Point at the CANAR conference and distributed it to other agencies at the conference. Another project she developed is a description of wrap around services available to clients. It includes tribal, county and state services. She uses it in her own work and has shared it with workers in county and state programs.

#### Benefits to their TVR Clients

All the graduates described ways in which they have improved services to clients. They are more aware of eligibility criteria and how to expand the range of services available to support their clients. One graduate described improved services: “*Well I know that for all clients, it helped to further define eligibility criteria for getting in the program. And I think for individual clients, it helped for us to better know what we could hook on to support services we could provide.*”Two graduates explained the improvements they made in working with the IPE. One noted an increased understanding of informed choice and working with clients to identify their preferences for employment. Another explained improvements in this area: “*I can do really good work with clients in the area of individualized plan for employment and give them informed choices where ... inform the clients of certain jobs that they may do or maybe cannot do, you know, so they can make informed choices on what kind of employment they are interested in. I feel like I can contribute in many ways now.*”He also explained his understanding of customizing employment for clients and, in his role as a job developer, plans to specialize in this area.

One graduate now understands the importance of utilizing resources specific to spiritual healing.

*A lot of programs don't utilize that portion of our grant. And making note that my clients know that there is that portion in our program that we can help with native healings that are in our area. And letting them know that they're not alone. And if it's not this community's belief, there's still that portion in our grant that we can help support them if need be. So that portion, that right there, has helped in a couple cases that I have had.*

Graduates also learned more about the limitations of supports they could offer. One realized she had not understood the policy on paying traffic fines, and now understands it is only allowed if it provides a license needed for employment.

#### Support from TVRI Staff

All the graduates praised the support from the TVRI staff. They noted that their questions were quickly answered, and the staff provided important support services. One explained that they were able to locate alternative scholarship support when she needed it. Another appreciated their support in helping him learn how to navigate the online technology. One noted how they solved technological issues such as finding ways to improve the audio for classes. Another student liked the fact that the staff made Canvas (the course online software) available on a smartphone to allow participation when they were not able to access a computer.

One student explained that she felt like they were engaged with her and were concerned that she succeeds with her courses. She explained this support.

*They're very communicative about different things. Like, ‘Hey [name of student] we see that you're not turning in this assignment.’ It felt nice that there were other eyes on my participation, or all of our participation. So, we got that extra help. Like, ‘hey, where are you? We do see that you're a little behind. Is there something that we can help you with? Or get you resources? So that was beyond helpful and beyond any other program. They would not let you drown. But you could tell that you were important to the program by their reaching out.*

### Summary of TVR Director Interviews

Four TVR Directors were interviewed by telephone in March 2018. Two of the directors have workers who graduated from the Institute and two have workers currently taking courses. Directors were asked if the certificate program had met their expectations for their workers. They all agreed that it had. They have observed their workers using skills and knowledge they learned. Some examples include:

* Increased level of professionalism with clients
* More efficient job placement techniques
* Increased understanding of roles and responsibilities
* Up to date information on regulations
* Ability to manage more complex cases
* Increased appreciation for coworkers’ responsibilities and understanding of their roles

One director explained that the Institute is, “*probably one of the highest quality training opportunities that I've seen in a long time. The fact that they actually give college credit is exemplary. We've never had that before.”* However, she expressed concern that the certificate did not bridge to a bachelors’ degree program. She noted that:

*One of the comments that I have is that he had great momentum while he was in the TVR Institute classes, one after the other, completing them successfully. But, somehow, I wanted to make the comment that I would hope that part of the curriculum would be helping the student to make next steps towards their bachelor's degree more than just kind of talking about it. Because, even though he has looked into it, in my opinion, he has lost the momentum as a student that he had completing class after class, because he didn't go straight into a bachelor's program.*

The directors described several ways in which TVRI students shared what they were learning with their colleagues. In one case, the worker shared his papers with the staff. She also explained his contributions to staff meetings.

*Each month, we have staff meetings, and we, in those staff meetings, we break it down into the different types of services that we provide that have some flexible way for those to be provided, and we just open it up for staff to talk about problems, to talk about successes. I think that he's been a more proactive member of that staff, to be able to talk about those different topics and come up with improved ways, continual improvement of the way that we're carrying out our services.*

The directors were asked if they had any evidence that the training had influenced increases in successful closure of cases. One noted that the graduate was a support worker, not a counselor. She also explained that a successful closure is a lengthy process. However, she believes that, with training and improved service delivery, closure rates will increase. The enthusiasm of the graduate has inspired one of his co-workers to enroll in the TVRI. Another director is seeing more progress in working through cases with the worker, but it is too soon to see closure rates increase.

One of the graduates has not had any complaints registered so participation in the Institute did not affect a decrease, and she believes improvements in his work will increase client satisfaction. Another has had no change in complaints registered over the year. The office has not had an opportunity to analyze client satisfaction forms to see if there are any changes.

The directors were asked if there were subject areas that they would like to see included in the Institutes curriculum. The following suggestions were offered:

* Ethics and tribal communities
* Specific classes on specific disabilities like alcohol and substance abuse, mental health disorders
* Bridging to a bachelor’s degree

### Conclusion

The graduate interviews support the course evaluation surveys. Both highly praise the content of the courses and the quality of the instruction. Graduates would like to have more information on project administration noting that some of this content such as writing the annual report was only briefly covered in the course. Since two of the graduates were promoted to director positions, it is understandable that more administrative information would be desirable. Writing was the only skill area in which graduates would like more assistance.

The director interviews corroborated the observations of the graduates. Directors believe that the Institute has contributed to the knowledge and skills of the graduates (and of workers still participating in courses for the certificate). Both the graduates and directors would like the Institute to help graduates transfer to a bachelor’s level program.

### Appendix – Interview Guides

**Interview Guide – AIVRS Directors/Supervisors**

We are interested in learning how AIVRS directors and supervisors view the benefits of the TVR Institute. (name of worker) completed several courses. We would like to know your views on how her/his participation in the TVR Institute has contributed to the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services.

1. In what ways did you hope your worker(s) would benefit from the course offerings of the Institute? What expectations did you have, or do you have, regarding the value of taking courses?
2. How well do you think these expectations were met given (name of worker)’s participation in the institute?
   1. On a scale from 1 being not at all to 5 being extremely well and with 3 is somewhat well how well have your expectations been met. (list the expectations in question 1 and get the rating.
3. Are there specific examples of ways in which (name of worker) demonstrated knowledge or skills learned at the Institute?
4. Did (name of worker) share any course information with you or with other workers in the office? If so, what types of information was shared, and how was it shared?
   1. Have any of the projects (name of worker) developed for a course contributed to ways things are done in your program? If so, please explain.
5. Has (name of worker)’s participation in the Institute contributed to any of the following:
   1. (Worker’s) improvements in successful closures of cases? (Is there a change in numbers of successful closures from before participation to after completion of several courses?)
   2. Has there been changes in overall closure rates as a result of (name of worker) sharing knowledge with fellow workers?
   3. (Worker’s) caseload – ability to manage more cases, or more complex cases?
   4. (Worker’s) ability to take on more responsibilities or to be promoted?
   5. (Worker’s) marketing of TVR services?
   6. Fewer number of CAP referrals or grievances involving (name of worker)?
   7. Other ways you have seen improvements?
6. Is there any evidence that client satisfaction with (name of worker)’s service has changed since her/his participation in Institute courses? *Has there been changes in overall client satisfaction as a result of (name of worker) sharing knowledge with fellow workers?*
7. Have you observed any challenges or issues that your students have had taking the courses that the Institute should be aware of?
8. Do you have any recommendations for the Institute now that (one or more) of your workers have enrolled in courses? *such as outreach, course delivery, assignments, etc.*
9. Did you have staff who enrolled in classes but did not complete them? What were the factors?
10. Did you allow (name of worker) to attend class and do homework during the work day?
11. Did (name of worker) have any difficulties in connectivity that affected their ability to attend class or complete assignments?
12. Are there areas in TVR that you think (name of worker) could use additional knowledge and skills in?
13. Do you have any final comments regarding the Institute, or its value to (one of more of your workers), or to the field of vocational rehabilitation for American Indians?

**Graduate Interview Guide – Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Institute**

As a recent graduate of the Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Institute’s program, we are interested in your experience with our courses and reflections on the value of the program. During the next few weeks, Dr. Joan LaFrance, the Institute’s external evaluator, will be contacting you to schedule a phone interview at your convenience. We appreciate your cooperation with the evaluation as it helps us ensure a quality program. Below is a list of the interview questions. The interview should take from 30 to 45 minutes. If you have any questions, please contact Laura Maudsley at the Institute ([lmaudsley@nwic.edu](mailto:lmaudsley@nwic.edu) or 360-255-4431). If you want to contact Dr. LaFrance, her email address is [lafrancejl@gmail.com](mailto:lafrancejl@gmail.com) or phone 206-706-6829.

1. As you reflect on your courses, do any stand out as being especially helpful to your work in TVR? If so, for what reasons?
2. Were any especially unhelpful, and if so, for what reasons?
3. Overall how would you describe the quality of the instruction you received? (Probe for details such as the instruction, pacing of the course, appropriateness of assignments, etc.)
4. Do you have any recommendations for improving the TVR Institute’s course offerings?
5. As a student, did you feel like you were an active participant in the learning? If so, please give an example.
6. While you were taking courses, did you share information with your colleagues? If so, please describe how you shared information from your courses.
7. Please give some examples about how you applied the information and skills that were covered in the Institute classes.
8. How has the new knowledge or application of what you learned contributed to your participants success? Please share examples.
9. How have you benefited from taking the course of study at the Institute? For example, has it influenced promotional opportunities, or led to more recognition and leadership in your office?
10. How satisfied are you with communications between yourself and the Institute’s faculty and the staff?
11. Did you attend any of the face-to-face classes at Sea-Tac, or in Spokane, or at a CANAR Conference? Yes, both.
    1. If so, how valuable was it to have the face-to-face class experience?
    2. If you did not attend any of these, what were the reasons for not attending?
12. Are there topics areas where you are trying to apply the knowledge and skills that you learned but you keep running into difficulty? What are they?
13. Are there topic areas where you feel you need additional training or skill development? What are they?
14. Are there any follow-up classes that you think would help you in your job? What additional supports would help you with your work?
15. Are there barriers your participants are experiencing that you need help addressing? Are there services that you need help accessing for your participants (such as mental health counseling, physical accommodation, job coaching or other services)?
16. Are there any comments you would like to share that have not been covered in these questions?