Effective Use of Word Clouds
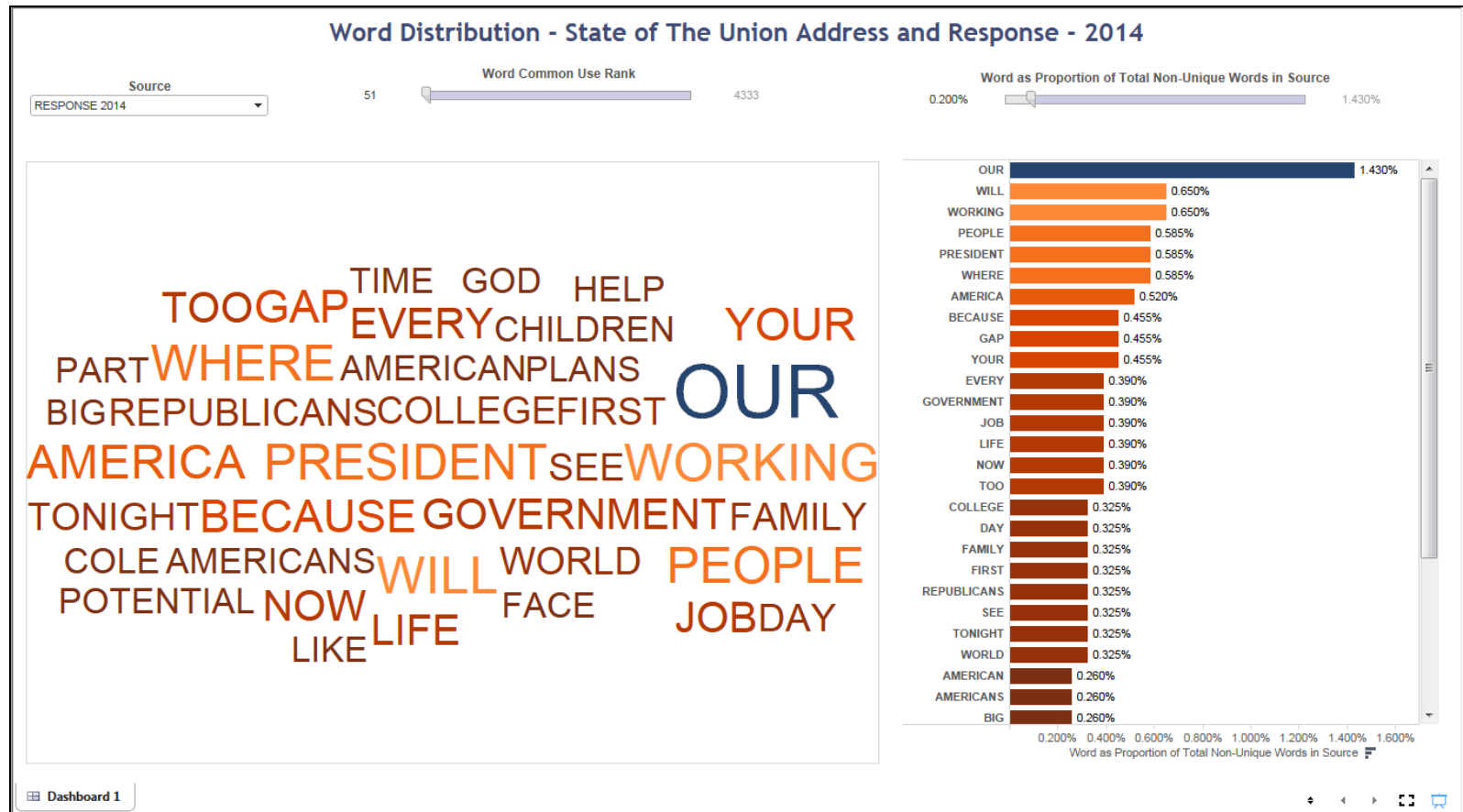
Purpose	This tool provides guidelines and tips on how to effectively use word clouds to communicate research findings.
Format	This tool provides guidance on word clouds and their purposes, and shows examples of preferred practices and practical tips for word clouds.
Audience	This tool is designed primarily for researchers from the Model Systems that are funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR). The tool can be adapted by other NIDILRR-funded grantees and the general public.

Word Clouds

▶ Word Clouds are visual displays of text data – simple text analysis.

▶ Word Clouds display the most prominent or frequent words in a body of text (such as a State of the Union Address).

▶ Typically, a Word Cloud will ignore the most common words in the language ("a", "an", "the" etc).

▶ The remaining words are displayed in a "cloud" with the font size of the word (and-or the coloring of the characters in the word) depicting the relative frequency of occurrence of each target word in the source material.

▶ Many freeware packages exist which can process input text and display the resultant Word Clouds.

▶ Most data visualization software also include Word Cloud analysis and display.

▶ Word Clouds are also called Tag Clouds (as in Internet tags, key words, metadata etc).

MSKTC
SCI · TBI · BURN

Model Systems
Knowledge Translation
Center

Word Cloud - State of the Union Address

Use the Word Common Use Rank slider to filter out common words – this example have already filtered out the 50 most common printed English words. The second slider filters the relative frequency of the words used in the actual Source document. Both sliders control how many words are displayed in the Word Cloud.

MSKTC | Model Systems Knowledge Translation Center
SCI · TBI · BURN

Word Cloud – Response to State of the Union Address

For greater impact, can combine word variants – for example may wish to combine "American" and "Americans" but keep "America" separately displayed. Note that Word Clouds are somewhat biased by word length. In this example, "Government" and "Job" have the same frequency of occurrence, but because the word "Government" has more characters, it appears more prominent.