Business Engagement Partnerships: Vocational Rehabilitation and Community Rehabilitation Providers

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The Job-Driven Toolkits contain resources on promising and emerging job-driven practices in vocational rehabilitation (VR).

INTRODUCTION

State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies are key providers of services for individuals with disabilities seeking employment. One important role of VR is business engagement: building relationships with employers to create opportunities for jobs and careers for VR clients with disabilities.

VR agencies conduct business engagement activities in a variety of ways, including dedicating VR staff to business engagement or job placement roles, and contracting with community rehabilitation providers (CRPs). This fact sheet summarizes discussions and presentations from a forum held in December 2016. In addition, it reviews issues and strategies involved in the VR–CRP partnership for business engagement and employer support.

OVERVIEW

Most VR agencies contract with CRPs to provide job development and support to VR consumers, even if they have their own staff focusing on these activities. There are pros and cons to contracting out these services.

PROS

- **CRP staff are already out in the community, contacting businesses on behalf of clients from developmental disabilities and mental health agencies.**
- **VR counselors who have large caseloads can focus more on counseling.**
- **Contracting out services to CRPs can help VR control costs, since CRPs are only paid when serving VR customers.**

CONS

- **When CRPs assist with job placement, VR is invisible to business. VR needs business visibility to stay competitive and document the value the agency provides.**
- **Business customers sometimes get frustrated with perceived duplication of services (for example, if they are getting calls from both VR and the CRP).**
- **CRPs often have high staff turnover, which can impact continuity of service and relationship-building.**

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Adapted from: *Vocational Rehabilitation Partnering with Community Rehabilitation Programs in Business Engagement and Employer Support*, by Laurie Ford, DeBrittany Mitchell, & Joe Marrone

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SIX KEY CHALLENGES EMERGED FROM THIS FORUM:

CHALLENGE 1

Building communication/ collaboration, confidentiality, and competition

- The need for communication and collaboration is increased when both VR and CRPs have staff contacting businesses.
- VR business engagement staff and CRPs can be hesitant to share information with each other about business contacts and job opportunities for clients.
- It can be challenging to maintain confidentiality within a VR/CRP team context.

CHALLENGE 2

CRP accreditation, staff certification, training, and professional development

- CRP accreditation helps ensure that CRPs will follow appropriate policies, but it does not guarantee better outcomes for VR consumers.
- The cost of accreditation may present a barrier to developing CRPs in rural areas or to serve low-incidence populations.
- Staff certification and training requirements vary from mandatory training on a specified curriculum, to mandatory training provided by the VR agency, to no requirements at all.

CHALLENGE 3

CRP quality, evaluation, score cards, profiles, and consumer choice

- It is difficult to decide which CRP evaluation factors will be included and how they will be prioritized.
- Objective data helps avoid reliance on subjective opinion, but such data can be difficult to obtain and interpret.
- Determining the best ways to use and share information with consumers is challenging.
- CRPs with good professional standards and high-quality outcomes seem to be the exception, and are highly valued by VR agencies.

CHALLENGE 4

VR–CRP payment structures and business engagement

- Since the 1990s, there has been a movement away from a fee-for-service model based on time spent or activity type, and toward payment for outcomes and outputs. However, some VR agencies have found that this type of funding change has not improved client outcomes.
- VR agencies rarely commit a specific amount of annual funding for CRPs, which makes it difficult for CRPs to predict and budget on VR revenues, compared to fee-for-service structures
- CRPs that have broadened their funding base beyond VR are more beholden fiscally to Medicaid and associated system rules than to VR requirements.

CHALLENGE 5

CRP coverage and access in remote areas

- VR consumers in rural areas face many challenges in obtaining and maintaining employment due to limited access to reliable transportation and limited coverage of CRPs.
- Low customer volume, complicated vendor application processes, and accreditation requirements all create barriers to recruiting organizations and individuals to provide CRP services in rural and remote, areas.

CHALLENGE 6

Strategic and innovative approaches to business engagement

- CRPs are natural partners in business engagement, and may have more flexibility than VR does in changing policies or practices. However, they must have competent staff and offer the quality services required by VR customers.
- Where CRPs are providing most of a VR agency's business engagement activity, the VR agency is generally not recognized as a major resource and source of innovation.
- In most states, CRPs compete with each other for referrals and access to VR funding. This makes it difficult to have CRP representatives participate in VR strategic planning without offending those that were not included.

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES IN CRP FORUM:
Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, New Jersey VR, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Oregon Commission for the Blind, Oregon VR, Rhode Island, Utah.

COLLABORATIVE MODELS

Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation Business Collaboration with CRPS (Nexus)

Florida Vocational Rehabilitation: Partnering with CRPs to Engage and Support Business

Utah State Office of Rehabilitation: Job Placement and Development

Minnesota VR/CRP/CIL Business Partnerships

Alaska DVR and Non-Traditional CRPs

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