**Emerging Practice**

**Date: 9/19/17**

**Title: Michigan Approach to Collaborative Business Engagement**

**Highlights:**

* Establish the infrastructure within VR for business consultants -- to increase staff capacity for business services. Increased activity with the NET/Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP) and coordination with Kathy West-Evans with CSAVR.
* Michigan Rehabilitation Services has taken a lead role with partners, including strong participation with the Lieutenant Governor’s Office and Centers for Independent Living agencies, in a business engagement strategy that includes “Hidden Talent Workshops” and the “Hidden Talent Tour.”
* Developed strategy in all AJCs to respond to businesses as a group rather than separately. This includes collaborative efforts with hiring events, training, and conferences.
* Development of a web-based shared data system for business accounts and tracking the effectiveness of serving business.

**Description:**

Building Agency Capacity

Michigan recognized several years ago the need to shift to a “dual customer” approach as an agency. Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) recently has “repurposed” positions to increase the expertise and capacity of the agency to effectively respond to business needs. MRS has worked with Kathy West-Evans to become active contributors/partners in the NET/TAP and has also been active with the CSAVR employment sub-committee specifically; the agency director, Sue Howell, serves as the current employment subcommittee co-chair.

Special Initiatives

In the Flint area, became involved in a “Disability Works” committee with the Chamber of Commerce, along with a local CIL. This partnership was strong enough to become a model for the same kind of partnership in other areas of the state. The local Disability Works Committee of the Chamber became involved at a national level. The visibility of this participation brought the partnership additional interest and support from Michigan’s Governor and Lt. Governor. This has been important to their ability to “repurpose” staff roles and strengthen the business service focus within the agency.

“Hidden Talent Tour” is an opportunity through the development of the agency and business partners to establish tours for businesses around the state to expand the awareness of disability employment in Michigan. The success of these tours led to the development of “Hidden Talent Workshops” for businesses to support the businesses to move past the “why” to employ people with disabilities and move to the “how to” stage.

Executive Directive 2014-1, signed by the governor, demonstrates the State of Michigan serving as a model employer. Initiatives were identified within the directive and supported/led by the agency to increase hiring of IwDs, retaining valued employees, and educating all civil service employees, including hiring managers.

Collaborative Focus

Citing a recognition that Businesses do not want multiple agencies coming to them to place job candidates at the same time, combined with the support provided to the state with the leadership of Kathy West-Evans, the business team at MRS has embraced a collaborative approach with regional AJCs in meeting the employment needs of local business groups. MRS leadership sees the collaborative business approach as currently in a “discovery” phase, and progressing at different rates in different regions.

Additionally, MRS, as well as other business service stakeholders (under WIOA) at all levels (field staff, managers and administrators), will explore a resource for data sharing that will enhance business service delivery with respect to WIOA indicator six, effectiveness in serving businesses. The Michigan Business Resource System (MiBRS) exemplifies interagency collaboration and strategies in the State of Michigan, particularly how to coordinate business service delivery efforts with data sharing technologies. MiBRS was Michigan VR’s intentional response to businesses of all sizes who have asked for a streamlining and coordination of public services to address their needs in a more effective and timely manner. Also, WIOA performance indicator six requires effective, interagency collaboration to serve businesses with the intention of enhancing outcomes for a diverse, qualified workforce. MiBRS is a custom built, web-based application that assists Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) and its agency partners coordinate, track, and measure business services across three major categories: acquisition, retention and disability management. Data regarding the effectiveness of all three categories are reported by the application to demonstrate both agency and interagency efforts in accordance with WIOA indicator six. The application also provides useful labor market information (LMI) to field staff.

The state core partners facilitate quarterly meetings to coordinate planning and support this “new paradigm” for the collaborative business services. The local process for the collaboration is characterized as follows:

1. Business service staff identified from local partner agencies meet and become familiar with the expertise each partner is able to provide in support to businesses.
2. Review active business relationships, and business with which the partners would like to establish business relationships.
3. For each business or business group/sector, identify a “primary contact.” *The intent is to streamline communication and support to a business in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall business service. Based on current contacts and history, a VR business specialist will be the “primary contact” for some business customers, while business specialists from other partner agencies are assigned as “primary contacts” for other businesses. Together, they stand shoulder-to-shoulder to establish a complete support package for all current and targeted businesses in the region.*
4. All partner agencies operate in a support role to the primary contacts for all businesses.

In this partnership, MRS has already demonstrated the value that they add to the overall customer service effort in the following four examples:

1. Section 503 has increased the emphasis for federal contractors located in Michigan to increase their emphasis on employment of individuals with disabilities in order to successfully receive these contacts. Other workforce partners were not aware, and MRS has been able to provide leadership in this area.
2. Businesses who are required by court mandate due to a disability discrimination lawsuit to respond to a consent decree often involving policy changes and ADA awareness training for all company employees.
3. There was a situation in which 13 CNA staff were about to lose their positions in a local business because of low reading skills. MRS staff could engage a training partner that was able to provide group training to these individuals so that the business customer and workers were able to continue their employment relationship.
4. Occupational therapy services are married with the business services model within the agency. Specifically, the agency’s OTs provide support to the business customer as it relates to prevention (of injury) to reduce risk of injury (disability management model) and retention of valued employees who have acquired a disability by providing ADA-related support services.

This partnership with the business customer has led to an increased recognition among the other partners of the importance in increasing the ability and comfort among the other partner staff in including individuals with disabilities in services that they provide. MRS has renewed their activity in providing Windmills (disability awareness) training and 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design evaluations to partner staff in the AJCs in various regions of the state.

**Evaluation and Potential Impact:**

Like other states where the emerging practices are noted regarding collaborative business activity, the Michigan Rehabilitation Services is in an early stage in doing this with their AJC partners. Together, they have developed a common vision for customer service based on a demand driven model, but it is a new way of doing business, and the changes move people out of comfort zones with business relationships that many have worked hard to establish.

This process is unique in vision in that, on a local level, the agencies have developed a common strategy for customer service. The experience of these partnerships should be expected to generate stronger employment outcomes for the full system and reflect positively regarding each of the separate partner agency performance numbers. Regardless, it will continue to be important for all partners to consider the successful inclusion of all of the target service populations, including those with disabilities, in order to strengthen the collaborative approach to business in the future.

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