

Rehabilitation Services Administration: Vision for the VR Program in the Workforce System

Weekly Webinar for September 16, 2015
DHS Division of Rehabilitation Services

Technical Assistance Circular 15-02

“Vision for the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program
as a Partner in the Workforce Development System under the
Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act”

Illinois Vocational Rehabilitation Program

- Annual budget of around \$140M (\$100M federal)
- 44 field offices with 245 rehabilitation counselors
- Around 42,000 people served per year- about 29,000 open cases at any one time
- In FY2015 5,442 individuals were successful rehabilitated closures with at least 90 days of competitive employment (minimum wage or higher, same pay and benefits as non-disabled workers in the same job title)

VR Customer Overview

- About 10,500 high school students served in FY2015
- 53% of all new cases are less than 21 years of age
- 1,517 people in university programs
- 1,661 people in community college
- One third of customers receive SSI or SSDI benefits
- About 1,150 people receive supported employment services
- 49% of customers classified as having a most significant disability

VR Customer Disability Profile

- Blind or visual impairment: 7%
- Deaf or hard of hearing: 7%
- Physical/mobility impairment: 8%
- Mental illness: 11%
- Intellectual disability: 14%
- Learning disability: 30%
- All other impairments: 23%

Eligibility and Functional Limitations

- Person must have a physical or mental impairment that limits ability to work
- Eligibility based on functional limitations not on disability category
- Evaluated on seven areas of functioning: mobility; communication; interpersonal skills; self-care; self-direction; work skills; work tolerance
- Must have a serious functional limitation in at least one of these seven areas

Overview of VR Role

- WIOA fosters new opportunities for innovation and collaboration across Federal, State, and local agencies, private organizations, and employers.
- The law authorizes increased access to employment, education, training, and support services to assist individuals with disabilities, [including youth and students with disabilities](#), to succeed in the competitive labor market.
- To that end, the VR program is a critical component in the workforce development system.

Workforce Partnership

- RSA envisions the State VR program as working with other workforce development system partners to assist workers with disabilities...
- by providing them with the necessary services and supports so that they can acquire the [skills and credentials](#) that they need...
- to have the opportunity to pursue [in-demand jobs](#) and careers.
- In so doing, the State VR program's [leadership in the one-stop system](#) is critical to growing our economy, ensuring that everyone who works hard is rewarded, and building a [strong middle class](#).

Key Principle

- Embedded throughout WIOA, including the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, is the principle that individuals with disabilities, [including those with the most significant disabilities](#), are capable of achieving [competitive integrated employment](#) when provided the necessary skills and supports.
- *“Employment First”*

WIOA Unified Plan

- The Unified State Workforce Plan must include a unified strategic vision and goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce.
- The VR program, as a core program, plays a lead role in the implementation of a Unified State Plan that supports the provision of VR services to enable individuals with disabilities to obtain competitive integrated employment in [high-demand fields](#).
- To that end, the VR agencies can ensure the needs of individuals with disabilities, [especially those with the most significant disabilities](#), are incorporated into the State’s unified strategic planning and goals.

Emphasis on Performance

- WIOA also strengthens the accountability of the publicly-funded workforce development system by establishing a [common performance accountability system](#) for all core programs.
- By aligning and coordinating their data systems, the VR agencies and the other core partners promote the availability of data that will be used to [evaluate and improve the outcomes of all participants in the system](#), including those of individuals with disabilities.
- Note: Key measures are job retention at 6 and 12 months after closure [program exit], median earnings, and attainment of credentials and degrees.

The One Stop System

- One-stop centers and partners provide job seekers, including [individuals with barriers to employment, such as individuals with disabilities](#), with the skills and credentials necessary to secure and advance in employment with [family-sustaining wages](#).
- Additionally, AJCs [enable employers to easily identify, recruit, and hire skilled workers](#) and access other supports, including education and training for their current workforce.
- As a core partner in the one-stop system, the VR agencies can use their expertise to ensure that individuals with disabilities get the services they need through the VR program, [as well as other programs in the one-stop system](#), to prepare for and obtain competitive integrated employment.

Services to Employers

- In addition, the VR agencies can play a [critical role in working with employers](#) who are interested in hiring qualified individuals with disabilities.
- Individuals with disabilities are provided a full opportunity through the VR program to engage in [job-driven training](#) and pursue high-quality employment outcomes.
- WIOA enhances opportunities for VR agencies to [provide needed training and technical assistance services to employers](#) hiring, or interested in hiring, individuals with disabilities....
- including the availability of [work-based learning experiences](#) that prepare individuals with disabilities, including students and youth with disabilities for competitive integrated employment.

Emphasis on Transition Age Youth

- WIOA also places heightened emphasis on the provision of services necessary to assist youth with disabilities, [including youth with the most significant disabilities](#), to achieve competitive integrated employment in the community, including supported or customized employment.
- [VR agencies should coordinate the delivery of services](#) to youth with disabilities, especially youth with the most significant disabilities, with other providers in the State who serve this population to ensure they receive the necessary services and supports to achieve competitive integrated employment.
- [VR agencies should work with State and local educational agencies](#) to ensure that the services provided are coordinated and seamless across the various programs that support transition for students and youth with disabilities from secondary education to postsecondary education and employment.

Expansion of Transition Services

- Expand services to support the transition of students and youth with disabilities from secondary education to postsecondary education and employment.
- WIOA, [expands the population eligible to receive certain discrete services](#) and permits a wider range of services to students who are transitioning from school to post-school activities.
- In addition, the Rehabilitation Act permits the provision of transition services for the benefit of [groups of youth with disabilities](#).
- Note: This would be a significant change for DRS transition services.

Recommended Actions for VR Agencies

- Expansion of services to students and youth with disabilities
- Revise formal interagency agreements
- Develop policies and procedures for coordinating with local educational agencies
- Develop or strengthen coordination of services to [out-of-school youth](#) with disabilities
- Revise website information and other materials on pre-employment transition services
- Identify best practices in the States for the provision of transition services
- Develop and strengthen partnerships with service providing agencies

Employers and Local Boards

- Expand partnerships with employers
- VR agencies should [expand outreach activities to employers](#) and potential employers, including enhancing opportunities for [work-based learning experiences](#), such as [internships and apprenticeships](#), for individuals with disabilities.
- Ensure workforce development boards become WIOA-compliant.
- When [establishing standing committees](#), States are strongly encouraged to focus on serving youth, low-skilled adults, American Indians, [individuals with disabilities](#), and other priority groups in the local area.

Reassess the One-Stop Delivery System

- VR agencies should reassess the one-stop delivery system to achieve service delivery models that place the individual, [especially individuals with disabilities](#), in the center of program design and delivery.
- Consider how the VR program can partner with the one-stop centers to [ensure the one-stop centers are physically and programmatically accessible](#) to help individuals overcome barriers to becoming and staying employed, to support applicable career development services, such as initial assessment of skill levels through the one-stop delivery system, as well as how individuals with disabilities, especially VR-eligible individuals, will benefit from a more integrated one-stop system.

Summary of RSA Vision for VR

- State VR programs need to work together with [everyone](#)
- Major expectation for VR agencies to expand and extend transition services to youth with disabilities
- Get started on building relationships with employers
- Take steps to become a full partner in the one stop system
- Focus on efforts to include people with the [most significant disabilities](#) in pursuit of competitive integrated employment

Moving Forward

- VR staff need ongoing training to gain a better understanding of workforce system policies and services
- Joint training of VR staff and workforce staff is recommended around key program issues
- A focus on services to youth seems a natural starting point
- DRS has considerable resources to offer regarding program accessibility particularly regarding accessible technology
- VR staff have a lot to learn about the data and information resources used by one-stop staff
- Keep you ears open!