



RETAIN

Retaining Employment
and Talent After
Injury/Illness Network

RETAIN Technical Assistance (TA) and Evaluation Guide: Who Can Help

As RETAIN awardees, you have access to two different sources of support and information. Both will help you successfully plan, pilot, execute, and evaluate your projects. This document describes which contractor is best able to answer what type of questions. It is helpful to understand how these contractors each relate to the project, but we have good news! Both of the contractors have a “No Wrong Door” policy. Each provider will immediately refer questions to the other provider as needed – so you don’t have to stress about whether you sent it to the wrong place. In addition, keep in mind that your Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) Federal Project Officer (FPO) is always available to help you to address any questions you may have and to assist you in accessing the support you need.



THE CONTRACTORS

American Institutes for Research (AIR)

AIR is the programmatic TA provider for RETAIN, under contract to the Department of Labor (DOL). They offer TA support to help you plan and implement your evidence-based projects with the goal of improving the stay-at-work/return-to-work (SAW/RTW) outcomes of program participants. AIR will also hold webinars, convene a community of practice, assist you with your outreach-related needs, provide online resources for your reference, and publish a periodic awardee newsletter.

Mathematica Policy Research (MPR)

MPR is the independent evaluator for all RETAIN projects, under contract to the Social Security Administration (SSA). Their support will help you plan and implement your projects in a way that facilitates a rigorous evaluation.

Each contractor has listed a liaison for your state on the “Key Points of Contact” document. You should direct your questions to that person. Please feel free to reach out to your state’s two liaisons early and often. Remember, they are here to help you!

The rest of this document breaks out the guidance in two ways: first, by contractor, and then by two specific topics that may interest you. It concludes with a brief mention of Phase 2 selection.



AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH (AIR)

✓ TOPICS COVERED:

- RETAIN project staffing and organizational structure
- Partnership development and defining partner roles and responsibilities
- Recruitment and enrollment plans, processes, and implementation
- Best practices in occupational health
- Curricula and training materials for health care providers and RTW coordinators
- Evidence-based best practices for employers, including workplace-based interventions
- Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) – assistance in identifying and collecting the data you will need to monitor and improve the operation of your project
- Establishing data-sharing agreements with project partners in your state
- Integrating RETAIN into existing data systems or establishing new data systems
- Documenting your data system and ensuring data security
- Communication among RETAIN awardees across states to facilitate a community of learning
- Communication and outreach to stakeholders such as:
 - Project partners
 - Employers
 - Health care systems or providers
 - Workers/participants
 - Other state agencies or programs

❓ SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO DIRECT TO AIR:

- How can we structure our project to provide the best services that meet the goals of RETAIN and are consistent with the model we are implementing?
- Which organizations (such as employers or health-care providers) are the most critical partners for our program, and how should we reach out to build relationships with those partners?
- What are some strategies to coordinate care for injured and ill workers across health care providers, employers, and the public workforce development system to help them SAW/RTW?
- Are there any factors that we need to consider if participants are receiving workers' compensation, state disability insurance, or private disability benefits?
- What are some evidence-based best practices in occupational health, including alternatives to opioids for pain management, which we can integrate into our program?
- Can you help us develop curricula and training materials for health care providers and RTW coordinators?
- Do we have adequate project staff, including RTW Coordinators, with the relevant skills to give us the best chance of success?
- What are some employer best practices in improving SAW/RTW? How can we best communicate with employers to promote these practices?
- Do you have recommendations on effective ways to recruit participants?
- What will we need to do to expand our program if DOL selects it for Phase 2?
- How do we integrate Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) into our project for the purposes of enhancing our SAW/RTW process, partnerships, and overall implementation?
- What data systems should we use to track our program, and what documentation do we need?
- What data-related security measures must we adopt to comply with federal or state requirements?



MATHEMATICA POLICY RESEARCH (MPR)

✔ TOPICS COVERED:

- Evaluation design, randomization, and potential alternatives to randomization
- Sample sizes
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) review and approval
- Informed consent for participants
- Conducting surveys
- Data elements for evaluation
- Establishing data-sharing agreements with SSA

❓ SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO DIRECT TO MPR:

- What criteria will be used to assess our project's evaluability? How can we improve the evaluability of our project?
- How many participants do we need to serve for MPR to be able to statistically evaluate our intervention and identify policy relevant impacts?
- What research design will be used in evaluating our program? How do we maintain fidelity to that design?
- If our project is able to use a random assignment evaluation design, when and how should we conduct random assignment with our participants to ensure the best evaluation results?

- Can I contact participants in the comparison or control group? What should I do if I provided services to the comparison or control group?
- Can you explain when and how best to interact with our Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure we implement ethical practices with our intervention?
- When and how do we need to get informed consent from potential participants? How can we incorporate that into our enrollment process?
- What state law requirements must we meet in order to share data with federal partners?
- How can we ensure we are collecting consistent, high-quality data?
- When and how do we survey participants and/or health-care providers?
- How do we coordinate with MPR on the timing of their evaluation surveys?
- What should we do if project participants want to receive services but not be part of the research study?
- Whom do we notify if participants withdraw from the project?



HOT TOPICS

These charts may help you better understand how MPR and AIR both support two critical “hot” topics, from different perspectives. These topics are: 1) recruitment and enrollment, and 2) data. Remember, though, both providers have a “no wrong door” policy, so when in doubt, contact either one and don’t forget that you can always reach out to your ODEP Federal Project Officer (FPO).

Hot Topic #1: Recruitment and Enrollment

❓ QUESTIONS FOR AIR:

- What suggestions do you have/approaches could be used to support or improve our recruitment?
- How early do we need to intervene with project services after someone suffers an injury or illness?
- What are some strategies we can use to identify workers early after injury/illness onset?
- What are some effective messages or outreach strategies to get more health care providers (or employers, or other partners) interested in working with us to recruit participants?
- How specifically will our recruitment partners identify workers who are potentially eligible?

❓ QUESTIONS FOR MPR:

- How do our recruitment plans fit into the evaluation design for our program?
- Are there changes to those plans that would better support a rigorous evaluation?
- Do our recruitment plans adequately prevent potential selection bias in the recruitment or enrollment process?
- How do we screen potential participants for eligibility in a way that facilitates the evaluation design?
- How do we incorporate informed consent, the baseline questionnaire, and randomization into our enrollment procedures?
- Are we on track to meet our enrollment goals?
- What should we do if participants withdraw from the project?

Hot Topic #2: Data

❓ QUESTIONS FOR AIR:

- How will we collect, store, and use data for the project?
- What data do we need to operate, monitor, and improve the operation of our project?
- What are the best data system options for our program? Can we modify existing systems, or do we need to build a new system? What assistance can you provide to help us in this area?
- How do we create data-sharing agreements with other agencies or partners within our state (for us to receive data from them)?
- What kinds of data security do I need in order to protect participants' data?

❓ QUESTIONS FOR MPR:

- What data elements will best support a rigorous evaluation?
- How do we improve the quality of our data collection?
- How will we receive the random assignments for our participants? Will we need to use a different data system for this?
- How can I meet my state's data security requirements in order to be allowed to share data with SSA?
- How do we create data-sharing agreements with SSA?

SELECTION INTO PHASE 2:

A subset of Phase 1 grantees will be chosen for Phase 2 grants. This selection will be made by the Department of Labor with input from the Social Security Administration, and it will be based on criteria that include the programmatic readiness assessment completed by AIR, the evaluability assessment completed by MPR, and many other factors. All selection factors, including weighting, will be delineated in the Phase 2 Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA).