

Level 1 Stakeholder Script

Talking to Injured and Ill Workers or Patients About Your Program and the RETAIN Project

Note: This document is intended to provide you with sample answers to commonly asked questions that injured and ill workers or patients may ask about your RETAIN project. As you review the document, please keep in mind that:

- Several answers may need to be customized based on the specific parameters of your project.
- This is not designed to be a verbatim script—you may not need to share all of the content outlined in this document. Rather, it is meant to address common questions you may hear from potential project participants. You can pick and choose from the messages outlined below, and customize your responses based on the cues and specifics you are hearing in your conversations. As you do so, please aim to use plain language.
- This is considered a “Level 1” script that addresses questions about your program and the research study at large; specific messaging related to specific interventions, patient care, employment counsel, etc. can be addressed in a “Level 2” series of scripts customized for your project.
- You may need to edit language in order to match terminology outlined in your Informed Consent Agreement. Certain descriptions should replicate the language in those forms.

The RETAIN technical assistance (TA) team looks forward to hearing how this document is serving you as you begin putting it into practice. If there are additional questions you would like to add to this sample script, or inquiries you need help answering, please let us know by contacting your AIR team liaison.

What is [State Project Name]?

- [State Project Name] is a free, grant-funded program focused on **helping people like you**—people whose lives have recently been disrupted because of an injury, illness, or worsening health problem. **We can help you navigate your road to recovery and get your everyday life back on track as quickly as possible.**
- The goal is to **help you get better and back to your usual responsibilities at home and at work**—preferably with a full paycheck.
- **We know you have a lot to deal with right now**, and maybe some worries about the future. And you may wish you had someone to turn to—to listen to your situation, give you some advice, and point you towards solutions.
- That’s what [State Project Name] can offer you. We’d like to help you **navigate a path forward as you recover and rebound.**

Who can receive [State Program Name] services?

You may be able to receive our services if you:

- [States to insert based on their project criteria]

How will I benefit from [State Project Name]?

- [State Program Name] will help you create your own **step-by-step roadmap to getting life back to normal** so you can feel better and start to resume your daily routines, responsibilities, and pleasures—preferably with a full paycheck!
- Everyone knows that a big benefit of getting back to work is the pay. But there are other important benefits, too.
- From a **health** perspective, being physically active and feeling productive can help:
 - Speed up your recovery.
 - Reduce the risk of hurting yourself or getting sick again.
 - And reduce the chance of getting a second health problem that can slow down your recovery.
- And then there’s the positive effect on your **quality of life**. [State Program Name] will help you:
 - Keep to your daily schedule and stay connected with other people.
 - Stay involved and have a sense of purpose.
 - And keep up your skills.
- I also might add that this program may be replicated on a larger scale outside of our state. **So, by participating, you’ll have the opportunity to help yourself, and many others** who may be in your same situation.

- But I want to reiterate that **our program is here to help you**, and that studies have shown that people in your situation can really benefit from services like the ones [State Program Name] is offering you. The participants in these programs end up feeling better and are able to focus on getting their routines back to normal step by step. In turn, they spend less time away from work and start feeling productive again—and they go back to getting a full paycheck sooner, too.

What’s involved in being part of the [State Project Name] program?

- When you join the program, **we’ll match you with a person called a Return-to-Work (RTW) Coordinator**. It’s their job to work with you on a plan that fits your needs. They’ll help you set goals and find tools to get back on track—including tools to help you thrive on the job once you return.
- Your RTW Coordinator **will not interfere** with or disrupt your existing relationships with your doctor or employer—they’ll team with the right people to help you succeed.
 - **With your permission, they’ll work with you, your doctor, and your employer** to figure out the best way to get back to work. That may mean adjusting your work activities while you get better, or helping you find an alternative position for a while. And if you aren’t able to return to your existing job, they can help you find a new position with another employer.
 - **They’ll also guide you through the process of getting better**. They’re there to help you follow your doctor’s treatment plan, help you coordinate appointments, answer your questions, and make sure you stay connected with your care team as you recover.
- We know there is a lot that you have to manage right now, and **your RTW Coordinator is there to make it easier for you to “choose work.”**
- They’ve worked with and/or studied the cases of hundreds of people in your same situation, so **they know what works and how to help you get your life back on track.**

What does it cost to join [State Project Name], and how much time does it take?

- Being part of the [State Project Name] program is **free of charge. Your only investment is time.**
- It may take about [insert details] over a period of about [x weeks] to talk with your RTW Coordinator by phone or in person.
- The program also factors in time for your medical visits—but these would probably be the same level of time commitment even if you did not join our project.
- Bottom line—**you’ll be getting a lot in return for the time you invest.**

You said my RTW Coordinator will talk to my employer about things I might need at work. Can you tell me more about that? Can they do that without my permission?

- We consider it our job to make sure that you can do your best once you return to work, even if it's to a new or temporary position. And ideally, that means having members of our team talk with your employer about your needs. But **we won't talk to your employer without your permission and cooperation.**
- If you authorize it, **our [State Project Name] team will find out what your needs are, talk with your employer, and team up with your doctor and employer on a RTW plan that makes sense for you.**
- This often involves **common-sense solutions or productivity tools.** Examples include:
 - Part-time hours.
 - Changing your job duties.
 - Working from home using a computer.
 - Working in a different job until you fully recover.
 - Or making some simple changes to your workstation or the way you do your job.

What if I can't return to my old job? Can [State Project Name] help me find a new one?

- Yes! Depending on your job duties, injuries, and/or illnesses, **it's sometimes necessary to make some changes to your job or even find a new job.**
- So, whether it's your old job or a new one, our **experts are here to help you** find a position that fits your needs so that you can keep working.

If I need a new job, how will you help me find one?

- That's the beauty of [State Project Name]. **Our RTW Coordinators are well connected** in this area and familiar with local workforce needs. So, we'll talk to our partners and employer network about your specific needs, and look for job matches that make sense for you.
- Then, we'll guide you through the application and interview process, and **talk with your new employer about the tools and arrangements you may need** to support your recovery and do your best at work.

What about SSDI? Is that an option for me? [Note: You should not bring up SSDI unless the worker/patient does.]

- Let's talk about that, because SSDI, or Social Security Disability Insurance, is not the best choice, or even an option, for everyone.
- Generally, your doctor needs to certify that you cannot work, and if you qualify for SSDI, you stop working and receive partial compensation on a regular basis.
- **But those kinds of benefits do not pay your full wage**, and they require your doctor to regularly certify that you are unable to work.
- In addition, we know that the longer you are out of work, the harder it is to get back to work and back to your original pay level once you return.
- **Some people think that disability benefits are their only options after they become seriously injured, but that often is not the case.** You can choose work, and we can help you.
- And that is where [State Project Name] is different. **Instead of having you stop working, we find ways to have you *continue* working so that you can fully recover, stay employed, and keep your paycheck.**

I'm not sure I can return to work at all. Is [State Project Name] for me?

- Before jumping to that conclusion, **please consider talking to one of our RTW Coordinators**, because returning to work can look very different for different people. There may be more options than you are aware of.
- It's natural to have a lot of questions and worries right now. You might be worried about reinjuring yourself or being unable to meet the demands of your job if you go back to work, for instance.
- But we've found that **people with even the most serious kinds of injuries and illnesses can return to work with the right tools and supports.** We're here to help you *retain* work in your life—if that's what you want.

How long is this [State Project Name] program, and what will you do with the results?

- The first part of this program will end on [date]. If you participate, your part of the [State Project Name] program will last until [insert based on what is in your project's informed consent form].
- During this time, we'll collect some basic information about you, the actions taken by your RTW Coordinator, your doctor, and your employer, and track the results.
- Ultimately, the federal agencies behind [State Project Name]—the U.S. Department of Labor and Social Security Administration—will be sharing some of the things learned through the program to help people get back to work after injury or illness.
- **So, by participating, you'll have the opportunity to help yourself, and many others.**

Will my results be shared with anyone?

[Note: The following should be adapted to match the language in your informed consent forms.]

- Not by name, no. **No one who joins the program will be personally identified in any report or paper about [State Project Name].**
- Some of the information used in the research program is already being collected at your doctor's office. This information is protected by strict health care information privacy laws and protections.
- Other information that we get from you will be kept in a secure database. The information that is collected from you will be kept in a computer system that can only be viewed by staff on this project.
- In addition, paper records will be kept in a locked file cabinet.
- Bottom line, this will be a confidential process. When the research information is summarized, no names will be used, and all data will be kept confidential.

I'm not sure this program is for me. I don't really trust research studies and don't want to give informed consent.

[Note: The following should be adapted to match the language in your informed consent forms.]

- We certainly understand you may have questions and concerns.
- **Participating is voluntary. It is your right to not give your consent to be part of this program.**
- You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to participate, for any reason.
- But, please consider that research programs are designed to obtain new knowledge that may help other people in the future. You may or may not feel you personally received any direct benefit from being in the program, but your experiences will be used to help others.
- Please rest assured that deciding not to participate in the program, or leaving it before it is over, will not affect your relationship with your health care provider or the [agency name].
- Also, you do not have to be in the research program in order to receive health care.
- Should you decide to consider participating in [State Project Name], I'll be happy to tell you more about the benefits of joining the program.

What if I have second thoughts about participating? Will I be able to leave the program at any time? [Note: Only address this if asked whether they can drop out of the study mid-way through]

[Note: The following should be adapted to match the language in your informed consent forms.]

- **Yes. You can leave the program at any time, without penalty.** This will not affect your health care visits. The [State Project Name] team also has the right to stop your participation at any time.
- All of that said, we are interested in learning why you plan to not participate. Would you be willing to tell us your reasons why?

If I don't join the program, or if I'm not selected, can [State Project Name] still help me?

Definitely. **Even if you don't receive direct services from our program, we can help.** I'd love to tell you about some SAW or RTW steps that may be important to you. For instance, we recommend that you:

- Discuss your needs and concerns with your doctor and follow his or her advice on how long you should remain out of work.
- Stay as active as possible, within the restrictions recommended by your medical team, of course.
- Follow your doctor's directions about activity at home and work.
- Let your employer know of your injury if you are comfortable informing them, and talk about possible changes to your job duties that will allow you to stay at work during your recovery. These are called reasonable accommodations, and you have the right to request these to do your core job tasks.
- Ask whether your employer has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which can provide you with a range of confidential services to aid in your recovery and return to work.
- Also, if you belong to a union, contact your representative. Unions often offer RTW assistance to their members.

[Note: Please customize this answer as needed based on the person's needs, how your program is structured, resources available in your state, etc.]

What do you mean when you say this program is "grant-funded"?

- [State Project Name] is **part of a grant program funded by the federal government** called RETAIN, which stands for Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network.
- Led by the U.S. Department of Labor in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, it is **evaluating effective SAW/RTW strategies** that can keep people in the labor force following illness or injury.
- The government saw the need to help employers and physicians get people back to work after they get hurt or sick, and **they awarded a grant to our state to establish [State Project Name].**
- Thanks to that funding, we are improving access to SAW/RTW services and helping people stay on the job.
- **That's why we need to collect data** as part of our service; the government is going to analyze how well our services are working here in our state and use that information to educate others on effective strategies.