

Community of Practice – Notes

Strategic Partnerships Session 3

The Secret is Out: Using Vocational Rehabilitation as a Resource for Your RETAIN Programs

Leslie Dawson and David Leon, SMEs

Thursday September 5, 2019

Introductions and share one key area of interest to you regarding employer engagement.

The following are some of the key areas of interests expressed by states regarding employer engagement:

- How are other states are using their vocational rehabilitation agency?
- How have other states engaged vocational rehabilitation in their projects (e.g., work site assessments and other levels of return-to-work coordination).
- Have states awarded a sub award or contract for vocational rehab to provide services and activities that they cannot provide under their funding.
- How can VR work can complement ours and vice versa?

How States Can Utilize VR Services When in Order of Selection

- Discussed how to utilize VR services even within the order and selection.
 - SME suggested that VR Application process could be modified to help identify potential RETAIN participants. For example, if RETAIN is partnering with VR state program and they are informed of the types of referrals that you are looking for, they can possibly add to application process by asking a few additional questions when somebody comes in and they are waiting for assistance in retaining their job.
 - SME shared that just because VR is in order and selection in your state it does not mean that the individual is not connected to VR and may have had a VR Assessment and Evaluation, that may be helpful. VR counselors can still assist your Return-to-Work coordinators with plan development, case management services, or consultation, just be sure you are including this as you are in your process of coordinating all these different players into this retention aspect. VR business relations staff, and technology staff can be very useful resources.
 - One of the great things about partnering with VR according to SME is that it can become a dual referral source for individuals who are appropriate for RETAIN services whether they go through the VR agency. It is a way to maximize the efficiency of getting the message out by working with your community partners and involving all the potential stakeholders to serve as many people as possible and getting people back to work.

Are you getting quality referrals from these sources?

- [STATE] shared that they've had several referrals and within those referrals there's been an interesting variety of different sources that they've come from, as well as different ways they're appropriate for the program. For the most part, they're appropriate but team waiting to see how they work out and draw some information from that.
- Another [STATE] added, they are still working on their screening process of what participants they will focus on. This is helpful in developing those questions for our return-to-work coordinators.
- [State] commented that they're looking at expanding their referral sources.

Partnering with Vocational Rehabilitation for Business Outreach

- [STATE] discussed focusing on how to message big business but have not reached out to businesses for their advice on messaging. They have been busy trying to come up with a plan for that.
 - SME recommended that the National Employment Team (NET) can help create those relationships. The NET interacts with many of those companies and there may be someone from your VR department who already has a relationship with their Diversity and Inclusion hiring person within their HR department. They may be a quick warm handoff introduction. That can happen without formal agreements related to other aspects of RETAIN and may be a great way to begin the communication and engagement of your VR in a more formal way.
- [STATE] stated they are receiving referrals from their university hospital. It is for employees that receive care. They are working to get patient referrals as well.

VR Buy-in: State Leadership Level

- Who from VR should be at the RETAIN planning table?
 - At the State level, often it is the head of the designated state unit for VR, maybe the chair of the state rehabilitation counsel, quality insurance or case work leaders, or state's business relations director.
 - At the Local Level, there are VR offices throughout the states, and every county is covered by VR counselor, every eligibility determination is made by a VR counselor, when you want to work at the local level you may be working more on trying to make sure you are getting all the referrals you are hoping to get. You might want to have regional or local managers, local VR counselors which is a great source for referral for RETAIN program. Local and regional business relations specialists, and rehab technology specialists are great sources to make sure at the table.
- SMEs offered ideas on what discussions should happen at the state level:
 - One conversation should be about the order of selection and how is it applied.
 - Common areas on WIOA measures across VR and REATIN.

- Discuss the e benefits of partnering with VR what the roles of each partner is; assessment, referral and case management; business outreach, things like education and disability; reasonable accommodation processes; connections to additional resources; and vendors at the local level. Also, connections to business and industry at the regional and local level.
- All of these things will help make sure that your RETAIN project is covering everything you want and including anyone who may be able to help grow this process, and make sure you are hitting the targets you want and helping anyone who can benefit to be able to maintain their employment.

Self-Reflection

- [STATE] learned the idea of using VR for warm handshakes to the companies that they are trying to reach.
- [STATE] was interested in helping large employers meet their inclusion goals and also reaching out to the employers for how we should message to them.
 - SME recommends targeting federal contractors because they are being evaluated by the Office of Federal Contracting Compliance for their affirmative action outreach and reasonable accommodation processes.