

Vermont RETAIN Success Story (June 2022)

Vermont RETAIN Expands Reach With a Free Online Learning Platform

Vermont RETAIN pursued an innovative partnership to build a cost-effective and engaging online stay-at-work/return-to-work training platform. The platform is accessible to Vermonters of different ages, abilities, and cultures.

BACKGROUND

Vermont RETAIN is invested in providing accessible stay-at-work/return-to-work (SAW/RTW) training and resources for workers, employers and health care providers to fill skill gaps and spread knowledge of SAW/RTW best practices. During the first phase of their program, Vermont RETAIN conducted an extensive gap analysis through focus groups and interviews with workers, employers, RTW professionals, and health care providers. Vermont RETAIN identified gaps in knowledge and misconceptions about SAW/RTW practices that could be addressed through best-practice trainings designed to increase knowledge and understanding of the SAW/RTW process. To reach a broad audience and make the trainings easily available and accessible, Vermont RETAIN saw an opportunity to host these SAW/RTW best-practice resources online.

CHALLENGE

Although Vermont RETAIN had the expertise and capacity to create SAW/RTW best-practice trainings, they lacked access to an affordable, accessible, and language-inclusive online learning platform to host these resources. Creating such a platform from scratch would be expensive, time-intensive, and would require coding expertise, which would not be the best use of Vermont RETAIN’s resources.



Challenge-Action-Results

Challenge: Access to a cost-effective online training platform that includes and reaches a broad audience.



Action: Vermont RETAIN leveraged partnerships to access an online platform that uses inclusive design principles to host accessible trainings. The program also supported access to video conferencing sites for program participants.

Results: The program partnered with VCPI to create and host SAW/RTW trainings and best-practice resources on a cost-efficient, inclusive, and sustainable training platform.

ACTIONS

To provide online access to SAW/RTW best-practice trainings that reaches diverse audiences and counters misconceptions among workers, employers, and health care providers, Vermont RETAIN is doing the following:

Leveraging partnerships. The Vermont Cooperative for Practice Improvement and Innovation (VCPI) offers best-practice training in mental health and addiction and has expertise in online learning best practices. Through a RETAIN-VCPI partnership, Vermont RETAIN is able to share VCPI's learning management system, Canvas, which is widely used in schools, universities, and private industry. Partnering with VCPI is cost-efficient: Vermont RETAIN does not have to create its own online learning platform, and Vermont RETAIN audiences have free access to Canvas.

Embracing accessibility to reach a broad and diverse audience. Vermont RETAIN uses inclusive design principles to create content for the learning platform that incorporates



many types of learning styles, languages, perspectives, and abilities. They purposefully include all Vermont RETAIN audiences throughout the design process, particularly those from historically underrepresented communities. Vermont RETAIN collaborates with state diversity experts to ensure that trainings represent the diverse people, heritages, and cultures of Vermont. In addition, content is viewer friendly on laptops, tablets, and cellphones. The content is 508-compliant, and user support for accessing or navigating the platform is available.

Developing trainings for specific audiences. Vermont RETAIN has best-practice SAW/RTW trainings for workers, employers, and health care providers ready to launch on Canvas and has adapted an introductory training on the RETAIN program for each of these audiences. The trainings for professionals will provide relevant continuing education credits. In response to user requests, Vermont is creating a best-practice training for occupational and physical therapists that will pilot in 2022 and a series of tip sheets on work-health topics requested by participating primary care providers.

Identifying more languages for training and materials. By April 2022, 28 of 55 enrolled practices requested translated materials. Vermont RETAIN will house translated resources on Canvas. Current requests include resources in Spanish, French, Dari, Pashto, Chinese, Bosnian, Nepali, and Tibetan.

Expanding internet access for program participants. Vermont RETAIN partners with Northern Vermont University's U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utility Service grant to provide access to free video conferencing sites across the state. RETAIN participants who lack internet service can access the online training platform at these sites. Vermont RETAIN also offers smartphones to participants, if requested, to help them access the program's online resources, including Canvas.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RESULTS

- ✓ *Created a cost-efficient, online education platform that will expand access to SAW/RTW best-practice knowledge and increase understanding among workers, employers, health care providers, and other RTW partners.*

Vermont RETAIN partnered with VCPI to access VCPI's online Canvas training platform and expertise in online learning.

Vermont RETAIN has three best-practice online trainings ready to launch, with more in development.

Canvas will host a "virtual library" of sharable content that will remain accessible beyond the grant period.

- ✓ *Used inclusive design principles and other strategies to ensure the training platform is accessible and engaging to diverse audiences.*

Vermont RETAIN coupled a training platform with key inclusive design features that consider the needs, abilities, language preferences, cultures, and learning styles of diverse audiences. Vermont is also a largely rural state. To ensure access to this inclusive online learning environment, Vermont RETAIN arranged for video conferencing site and smartphone access for people who lack internet connections.

"Creating accessible, engaging, and interactive digital content as a means of supporting diverse learning styles, abilities, and physical or cognitive challenges is a priority for Vermont RETAIN. The technology alone is not sufficient. Access must be supported by a thoughtful approach that incorporates empathy for the challenges our users face in their daily lives."

– Amy Stonoha, e-Learning Expert Consultant, Vermont RETAIN



Vermont is participating in RETAIN (Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network) to build connections and improve coordination among employers, health care providers, and other key parties to help newly injured and ill workers stay in the workforce. The state Department of Labor's Division of Workers' Compensation and Safety, in coordination with several partners, leads Vermont RETAIN. The U.S. Department of Labor, in collaboration with the Social Security Administration, sponsors RETAIN.

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