

RETAIN Sustainability Workshop: Partner Engagement – Notes

Facilitator: Erika Humphrey

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Erika facilitated introductions. She asked participants to come off camera to introduce themselves and share one example of how a partner has supported their RETAIN program. Participants shared how they work with many different partners, including working with charities, chambers of commerce, the Center for Disability and Inclusion, and other workforce partners. These partners have supported RETAIN programs in many ways, such as by providing ergonomic assessments, hosting collaborative meetings, developing marketing materials, providing training development, and providing work accommodations.

Erika then provided a brief overview of why partner engagement is important to sustainability efforts. She said partner engagement can help match potential partners to program needs. Partners can also help analyze a program's projected benefits and challenges for partners, and they can help clarify their roles and responsibilities. Erica said states will need to evaluate which partners will still be partners after RETAIN ends, and how partners can play a role in sustainability.

Erika said partners play many roles in sustainability planning, including helping to verify the sustainability initiatives, advocating on behalf of the program, providing feedback to refine sustainability strategies, and helping with the implementation of sustainability efforts.

Erika then asked participants to share how a partner has helped to refine sustainability strategies.

- Kentucky will be partnering with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) moving forward. OVR has been a key collaborator throughout the project, serving as a primary referral source. They are expected to take on a significant role in funding the project, assuming the majority of financial responsibility. Additionally, OVR will have substantial input into the structure of the services provided. Although the exact level of funding and its impact on service delivery are still being determined, OVR recognizes the complementary nature of the services offered and the value brought by the project. Its commitment as the primary funding source has been secured.
- Kansas stated it has focused on provider buy-in in terms of sustainability. The challenge is how to continue demonstrating value to both providers and patients. The goal is to stay in front of providers as much as possible, offering insights from their perspective. Kansas cannot just add a tool or form that becomes another burden for it. For example, how does Kansas intertwine its RETAIN efforts with case managers at the hospital? Kansas needs to be good salesmen for the providers to see value. Kansas has a champion to ensure things are properly documented and signed. The key question is how to make this a priority in healthcare when providers are already overwhelmed with competing demands.
- Ohio will be sustained through its engagement with employers. Ohio will actively engage with employers to help facilitate the sustainability plan.

Erika asked if any of the participants have clarified roles and responsibilities with partners in terms of sustainability.

- Kansas is undergoing staff changes, with many roles and responsibilities being reassigned during these transitions. Conversations have taken place between the leadership team and partners regarding RETAIN. The lead at the Department of Commerce has emphasized that this will be a key focus moving forward.

Peer Sharing

Erika then led a peer sharing session with participants.

Question 1: How is the team making sustainability objectives clear to partners? Are they holding meetings or reaching out to them? How are they communicating objectives?

- Kentucky: The team has a partnership with OVR. Communication is happening between the director of OVR and the Principal Investigator of RETAIN Kentucky to decide on high-level funding matters. Once those decisions are made, Kentucky will be in a position to engage with other partners. The team prefers not to communicate with additional partners until they have more information from OVR.

Question 2: Is anyone engaging with new partners? What strategies are being used to engage them?

- Ohio: Ohio is engaging new partners. For example, they are addressing the challenges related to the leave process when individuals are injured. They have engaged a leave-of-absence organization and are preparing to attend its conferences to connect with members of its leadership team. The hope is to strengthen this partnership by next year. The team is also actively collaborating with one of these partners on RETAIN activities. Some employers may not stay engaged in program, but this will be determined as they move into the next year.

Question 3: How has the team maintained current relationships with partners?

- Minnesota: DMEC leadership remains very engaged with RETAIN and is willing to assist in any way possible. Multiple RETAIN states are collaborating with DMEC on a Return to Work (RTW) certification course that will be available to anyone.
- Ohio: The Ohio team faces challenges with expanding sustainability plans. Currently, it has social workers based in specific operational markets who are knowledgeable about local resources. However, it is not realistic to have staff in every location they plan to serve, though they still want to offer social work services in the program. They asked if anyone had ideas on how to provide social services centrally.
- Kansas: The Kansas team acknowledged this challenge, noting that the overall issue is how to integrate these services into departments that are already overwhelmed, especially in hospitals where the need is significant. It plans to meet with leaders of these teams to discuss what integration might look like for them.