Vermont Progressive Employment Model Replication and Learning Collaborative: Request for Participation

The Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is partnering with the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) to implement a Learning Collaborative for replicating and studying the Vermont Progressive Employment (VTPE) Model in four state VR agencies. This study will document the implementation of the VTPE model and any potential impacts that the adoption of the model may have on employment outcomes. The study will also capture VR consumers' and employers' experiences and perceptions of the VTPE model.

This model replication and learning collaborative is conducted as part of the Vocational Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (VR-RRTC) on Demand-Side Strategies, at the ICI at the University of Massachusetts Boston, in partnership with Vermont DVR. The VR-RRTC on Demand-side Strategies is a national center for improving vocational rehabilitation (VR) responsiveness to employer needs. This research is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) Grant # H133B120002.

The goal of the Learning Collaborative and embedded research study is to replicate VTPE in other state VR agency settings, in order to further refine and test the model. The aim is to build an evidence base for VTPE as a dual-customer / demand-side strategy that improves employment outcomes for VR customers.

Overview of the VTPE Model
The VTPE Model is a dual-customer strategy specifically designed to address the needs of jobseekers with limited skills, little work history, and major challenges to employment (such as corrections histories) in concert with businesses that may be averse to hiring people considered 'high-risk.'

The VTPE approach packages readily available VR pre-employment options and coordinates rehabilitation counseling, job placement, and business account management to ensure that both jobseekers and businesses benefit. Over the past decade, the VTPE model organically evolved in Vermont. DVR piloted the model and documented successful outcomes for VR customers participating in VTPE. With the award of the VR-RRTC on Demand-Side Strategies in October 2012, Vermont DVR and the ICI engaged in a formal research and evaluation agenda to assess, replicate, and study the VTPE model.

To access the archived webinar presented in January 2015: *Progressive Employment Model Learning Collaborative Informational Webinar* visit http://explorevr.org/webinars/archived/webinar-Progressive-Employment-Model-Learning.html. For additional information on the VTPE model, please visit http://explorevr.org/Vermont_Progressive_Employment.html for other archived webinars and additional documents, and http://vocrehab.vermont.gov/whoweare/ourresults/research to download a descriptive paper published by Vermont DVR in 2012. Supplemental information about the Research

Activities, Fidelity Elements, and a list of Frequently Asked Questions is available on ExploreVR.org in this Request for Participation package.

Technical Assistance (TA) and Learning Collaborative
Each VR agency in the Learning Collaborative will receive Intensive TA to adopt the VTPE model from Vermont DVR and ICI staff. Direct technical assistance and training to VR personnel will be made available to participating agencies.

The learning collaborative is a peer-to-peer knowledge exchange model (notably used in public health) that will allow VR agencies to collaborate with one another to identify and apply practice-based solutions. We are using the learning collaborative as a vehicle for bringing multiple VR agencies together to replicate and study the VTPE model. Each VR agency will customize the approach to replicating the model and evaluating the impacts in their state, therefore the learning collaborative will serve as a resource of peers, researchers, and technical assistance providers from ICI and Vermont DVR.

The basic components of the Learning Collaborative include:
- 2 to 4 in-person meetings per year, and regularly scheduled telephone/videoconferences as needed
- On-site, phone, and email TA from Vermont DVR and ICI staff
- Wrap around research and evaluation embedded in activities.

Research Activities
The ICI will partner with participating state VR agencies to conduct an impact and process evaluation of the VTPE model. ICI researchers will work closely with VR agency staff to design the evaluation activities and embed them into the VTPE model replication plan. The research plan is designed in such a way that VR agencies will be comparing and contrasting VTPE outcomes with other consumers in their own program, not against outcomes in other states. This also will allow VR agencies to better evaluate how VTPE has performed in their own state.

Research requirements:
- Institute VTPE in the VR agency as defined by fidelity measures and adapted to the agency's policies and organizational structure
- Participate in on-site one day meeting to fit VTPE evaluation activities into your program, including population(s) and data to be collected
- Commit to training and Learning Collaborative participation
- Collect data for 24 months to inform ICI as well as your program

VR Agency data collection requirements:
- Accurately identify consumers who engage in VTPE and those who do not (e.g. create a "VTPE" client variable) in order to generate comparison groups
- Generate de-identified client-level 911 case service data linked with:
  – VTPE work experience type and dosage
  – VTPE employment type and site
  – Work experience outcomes

- Develop or expand an employer data base to track VTPE activities in businesses and activities of VR agency staff serving in "Business Account Manager" roles

ICI data collection:
- ICI researchers will conduct qualitative interviews with administrators, counselors, job placement personnel, VR consumers and employers as part of the process evaluation.

Timeline and Instructions for Application
Please refer to the following timeline for key project dates:
- Request for Participation in the Model Replication and Learning Collaborative Information Released: January 14, 2015
- Mandatory Consultation Period: All VR agencies must schedule a conference call with DVR/ICI staff to discuss participation during the period of January 20-February 13, 2015 prior to submitting electronic form
- Electronic Request to Participate Form Due Date: February 20, 2015
- Review and Follow up Period: ICI and DVR staff will review submitted materials and may request clarification or additional information of VR agencies during the period of February 23-March 13, 2015.
- Notification of selection to participate in the Model Replication and Learning Collaborative: March 16, 2015
- Project Year: April 1, 2015 through March 31, 2016.

This Request for Participation in the VTPE Model Replication and Learning Collaborative is extended to all state VR agencies in the United States and territories, including blind/general/combined agencies and Tribal VR programs.

Following the release of the Request for Participation, the ICI and DVR will open a consultation period from January 19th – 30th. All interested state VR agencies are required to schedule a one-hour teleconference call with ICI/DVR to discuss the proposed project prior to submitting the electronic form. The purpose of this call is to ensure both parties are in agreement regarding the proposed model replication and research/evaluation requirements, and to answer any questions about the Request for Participation. **To schedule a teleconference, contact Kelly Haines at Kelly.Haines@umb.edu or 617-287-5907.**

The electronic Request for Participation form is available at http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/1871287/Vermont-Progressive-Employment-Request-to-Participate-in-a-Research-Project

The form contains three required sections:
1) Letter of Commitment
2) Narrative
3) Staff Roster

The Letter of Commitment (LOC) should be 1-2 pages long, on official letterhead with the director's signature. The LOC should indicate firm commitment for the VR agency to join the Learning Collaborative for one 12-month period and for support to complete activities as defined in the narrative. The Narrative section includes ten open-ended questions (150 to 500 word maximum per question) about the VR agency's proposed plan for model replication and evaluation data tracking. You will be asked to describe your agency's current structure (staffing, case management system), plans for implementing VTPE (location, targeted population), capacity to implement VTPE based on the key model components (team approach, training offset), and critical data tracking (VTPE consumer status, employer database). The Staff Roster is a list of agency personnel who are participating in the project and their contact information. The electronic form must be submitted using the SurveyGizmo platform by pushing the submit button on the last page, by midnight Eastern Time on February 6, 2015 to be considered.

For technical support with the electronic form, contact Kelly Haines at Kelly.Haines@umb.edu or 617-287-5907.

Selection Criteria:
VR agencies that complete all required components of the Request for Participation form will be considered. The ICI and Vermont DVR team will consider VR agencies' responses to the narrative questions in the Request for Participation electronic form in order to assess the agency capacity to engage in the model replication and evaluation activities. Any additional publicly available data about the VR agency, including RSA-911 data or other public sources of information may be consulted by the ICI/DVR team to inform the selection process.

Notification of selection to participate in the Model Replication and Learning Collaborative will be made by February 16, 2015. The Project Year will run from March 1, 2015 to February 28, 2016.

Contact Information:
Kelly Haines, Project Director, Institute for Community Inclusion: Kelly.Haines@umb.edu
Dr. Susan Foley, PI. Institute for Community Inclusion: Susan.Foley@umb.edu
Hugh Bradshaw, Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation:
Hugh.Bradshaw@state.vt.us
Dennis Moore, Research and Evaluation Consultant: Dennis.Moore@wright.edu
Julisa Cully, Knowledge Translation, Institute for Community Inclusion:
Julisa.Cully@umb.edu