



# Model Demonstration to Improve Employment Outcomes for Individuals Receiving SSDI Benefits

## PROJECT FACT SHEET

### Project Overview

The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston and its partner Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. received a five-year grant from the US Department of Education, Rehabilitation Service Administration to study, test, and disseminate effective state VR agency practices for assisting VR customers collecting Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) to return to work at or above Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) levels. This project is hereafter referred to as The SGA Project. The SGA Project will generate a rigorously tested employment service-delivery model, manuals and processes for implementation, adoption strategies, as well as cost analyses.

The project will include four phases: 1) the identification of high-performing state VR agencies, leading to in-depth case studies of their practices; 2) the use of a Delphi Panel to review candidate practices and to design a VR employment services model that enables SSDI recipients to return to employment at or above SGA; 3) implementation, testing, and evaluation of the model in selected state VR agencies that will receive substantive training and technical assistance; and 4) dissemination and replication, including the development of training materials, curricula, procedures, and on-demand technical assistance initiatives.

### Project Launch

In April 2011, the ICI convened a national stakeholders meeting in Washington, DC to launch The SGA Project. Invited participants included: representatives from the US Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration and National Institute on Disability Rehabilitation and Research, the Social Security Administration, the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, state VR agency directors and senior managers, and other state disability program administrators, university representatives (TACE centers, RRTC's), and individuals representing disability advocacy and coalitions. The launch was a successful effort to discuss the five-year project and upcoming major activities with these stakeholders.

### Progress to Date and Next Steps

In order to identify state VR agencies with SSDI employment outcomes at or above SGA levels, researchers at Mathematica Policy Research conducted an analysis of RSA 911 data from 2005 – 2009. According to their findings, 20 of the state VR agencies were identified as high-performers and 7 were identified as improving.

Currently, the ICI is conducting key informant interviews with the directors of the 27 high performing and improving state VR agencies in order to learn about the practices assisting customers on SSDI reach SGA in their state. Based on the information collected, researchers will select a subset of these agencies for intensive case study research.

The purpose of these case studies is to obtain in-depth information about the identified practices including evidence of effectiveness and the potential for transferability to other state VR agencies. Case study data collection will include document review and qualitative interviews with VR supervisors, staff, and former VR customers. The goal is to use the identified practices to develop a model for employment service delivery and to test and evaluate this model in situ with a small number of state VR agencies (Phase 3). Concurrent with these case studies, the ICI is convening a Delphi Panel to systematically elicit comments and gain consensus in the identification of effective practices and the model to be tested in Phase 3.

The US Department of Education is supporting an exciting project of national significance. Extensive training and technical assistance will be available to the state VR agencies chosen to implement the model employment service practices. This will include the development of infrastructure, provision of professional-development experiences, and establishment of community partnerships. A comprehensive evaluation conducted by the ICI and Mathematica Policy Research will assess the effectiveness of these practices.

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