

Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC): Request for Participation in Intensive Technical Assistance & the Learning Collaborative

Letter of Intent Due: July 24, 2015
Application Materials Due: August 21, 2015

Purpose of the JD-VRTAC:

The Job-Driven Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC) is a national center for improving vocational rehabilitation (VR) responsiveness to job-driven needs. The Center strives to identify, adapt, embed, and sustain job-driven practices into vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies. These practices will lead to improved employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

The JD-VRTAC is focused on developing a knowledge base on the following four topical areas:

1. Labor market information (LMI)
2. Services to employers
3. Building and maintaining employer relations
4. Services to providers of customized and/or employer driven training

The JD-VRTAC is a part of the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston. The ICI has partnered with the following entities to create a strong Center: Jobs for the Future (JFF); the University of Arkansas (U of A); the University of Washington (U of W); the United States Business Leadership Network (USBLN); the Association of University Centers on Disability (AUCD); and Powers, Pyles, Sutter, and Verville, PC (PPSV).

The Center is also working in collaboration with other entities such as the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), the National Council of State Administrators for the Blind (NCSAB), and the Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR).

The JD-VRTAC will help support state VR agencies to learn about and implement job-driven practices through the provision of general/universal TA, targeted TA, and intensive TA.

Targeted and Universal Technical Assistance:

All 80 VR agencies will have access to both targeted and universal TA provided by the Center. This includes access to all the information gathered through the knowledge development resources developed during FY2015 including the following:

- The creation of a resource tool for each of the Center's topical areas
- Refining the ExploreVR web portal to house all JD-VRTAC information and resources
- Developing an index of promising and emerging job-driven practices
- Access to relevant products from other ICI VR-related projects

Universal & Targeted TA may include:

- Direct TA in any of the Center's four topical areas, including phone and email communication
- Communities of practice (CoP) participation
- Topical webinars

*Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC):
Request for Participation in Intensive Technical Assistance & the Learning Collaborative*

- Topical forums
- Conference presentations
- Consultation regarding future JD-VRTAC Request for Participation (RFP) proposal preparedness

The Center will disseminate information regarding upcoming opportunities for universal and targeted TA through the ExploreVR website; RSA, CSAVR, and NCSAB listservs; and other dissemination opportunities including CSAVR & NCSAB spring and fall conferences.

The Center will not use an RFP process for targeted TA requests, but rather a more informal approach to receive, process, and respond to requests for targeted TA. VR agencies are encouraged to contact Julisa Cully at Julisa.Cully@umb.edu for more information.

Intensive Technical Assistance (TA) and the Learning Collaborative Overview:

The JD-VRTAC has released this Request for Participation (RFP) for intensive TA to solicit interest among the 80 VR agencies nationally. Selected VR agencies shall receive intensive TA from the Center staff and partners. Additionally, those agencies will participate in a learning collaborative with the other VR agencies involved in intensive TA. The learning collaborative will enhance the level and scope of TA through peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, resource sharing, and feedback.

The TA delivered through the JD-VRTAC will be based upon research-supported and emerging promising practices that have been shown to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities, both on a state-by-state and national level. The JD-VRTAC will provide TA to selected VR agencies to achieve the following outcomes:

- Improve the ability of state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to work with employers and providers of training to ensure equal access to and greater opportunities for individuals with disabilities to engage in competitive employment or training;
- Increase the number and quality of employment outcomes in competitive, integrated settings for VR-eligible individuals with disabilities, including broadening the range of occupations for such individuals in such settings, that result from job-driven strategies; and
- Increase the number of VR-eligible individuals with disabilities in employer-driven job training programs.

Intensive Technical Assistance:

Center staff with expertise in VR and job-driven strategies will deliver TA. Each VR agency will receive customized intensive TA to meet their agency needs identified in their proposal, including the evaluation of the impact of the TA on their agency. The Center staff will conduct a preliminary in-person site visit to review the proposal and determine the agency's ability to implement the required changes and capture the outcome data. At that time, both parties will identify and agree upon the desired outcomes. The Center staff will develop an evaluation and TA plan for the completion the process. This intensive TA will involve the following:

*Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC):
Request for Participation in Intensive Technical Assistance & the Learning Collaborative*

- At least two JD-VRTAC staff will be assigned to work with the agency to provide the intensive TA; others will be involved as needed
- Two to four in-person onsite meetings during the year of TA
- Development of an intensive TA plan, agreed upon by the JD-VRTAC and the agency:
 - ✓ Plan describes activities, responsibilities and resources to accomplish TA goals and objectives
 - ✓ Identification of/and agreement about measureable goal and objectives, including the data to be collected to track progress and success
- Introduction and implementation of new practices, policies, or enhancement of existing practices
- Regular phone and email communication from the TA team
- Participation in the learning collaborative for the duration of the intensive TA to share and learn from other state VR agencies including one to two in-person learning collaborative meetings per year
- Wrap around evaluation embedded in activities
- Documentation of projects in enough detail to be shared through ExploreVR, National Clearinghouse, and communities of practices.

About the Learning Collaborative:

Each VR agency selected to participate in intensive TA will automatically join the learning collaborative (LC). The LC is a peer-to-peer knowledge exchange model that facilitates the identification, sharing, and application of practice-based solutions. ICI adapted an LC strategy to partner with 33 VR agencies including 7 Commissions for the Blind, 4 American Indian VR programs, and 21 General or Combined Agencies to test the strategy's capacity to engage VR agencies in intensive TA. This strategy successfully culminated in shared learning, adoption of practices, and professional development thus creating increased VR capacity across the country.

Intra-agency collaboration is facilitated through conference calls and in-person meetings. Center staff will facilitate the LC meetings. There will be bi-monthly conference calls that provide the participants an opportunity to interact with their fellow agencies. Some of the calls will be update sessions that provide the agencies a venue to get feedback on their project and to hear about the other agencies' projects. Other conference calls will provide opportunities to engage in smaller topical forums. There will also be the opportunity to meet in-person one to two times annually. Each agency will be asked to send two members from their team. During these meetings, the group will be able to share effective strategies and generate solutions for barriers they are encountering in their projects.

The goal of the JD-VRTAC learning collaborative is to create a sustainable infrastructure beyond the life of the Center by establishing a network of state VR agencies implementing the four job-driven practices.

*Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC):
Request for Participation in Intensive Technical Assistance & the Learning Collaborative*

Evaluation Activities:

The Center will partner with participating state VR agencies to conduct an impact and process evaluation. ICI researchers will work closely with VR agency staff to design the evaluation activities and embed them into the TA plan. Each participating VR agency will have a customized evaluation plan negotiated into the design and implementation of the TA plan. The Center will collect elements that capture the effectiveness and overall impact of the TA provided.

Each TA product and activity will be aligned with specific goals and objectives related to one or more of the four designated job-driven topic areas. TA will result in an impact on one or more of the three outcome measures driving the Center, linking back to the project goals, objectives, outcomes and measures, and using a rubric to guide the evaluation activities. This guide will drive the development of customized evaluation plans for each of the intensive TA sites.

Who may submit in response to the Request for Participation (RFP)?

This invitation to respond to the RFP in the intensive TA is extended to all 80 state VR agencies in the United States and territories, including blind/general/combined agencies. Following the release of the RFP, the Center will open a phone consultation period from July 24 – August 17, 2015.

All interested state VR agencies are required to schedule an one-hour teleconference with Center staff to discuss the proposed TA needs prior to submitting the electronic form. The purpose of this call is to ensure both parties are in agreement regarding the TA commitment and evaluation requirements, and to answer any questions about the RFP.

To schedule a teleconference, contact Julisa Cully at Julisa.Cully@umb.edu. The electronic Request for Participation form is available at <http://www.explorevr.org>.

Participation Requirements:

The state VR agency applying for intensive TA agrees to:

- Receive and participate in the intensive TA available through the JD-VRTAC for the project year: October 15, 2015 – October 14, 2016
- Participate in the learning collaborative of all intensive TA recipients served by the JD-VRTAC, including attending all meetings and calls to provide progress reports, lessons learned and share in problem solving with peers in the learning collaborative
- Agree to all requirements of the TA and learning collaborative including:
 - ✓ Identify one or more job-driven practices related to at least one of the four JD-VRTAC topic areas
 - ✓ Identify key staff to work on the intensive TA project, representing three agency levels (leadership, field services which includes field directors and supervisors, and direct service)

*Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC):
Request for Participation in Intensive Technical Assistance & the Learning Collaborative*

- ✓ Assist in planning and participate in a mandatory site visit as scheduled (between September 14 – October 9, 2015) to establish TA needs, outcome goals, and fit evaluation activities into TA activities
- ✓ Work with the Center staff on the development of a TA plan of action for the provision of TA and commit agency resources necessary to implement the TA plan
- ✓ Identify measureable objectives expected as a result of the TA
- ✓ Attend and participate in all meetings and calls with the Center staff and the learning collaborative.
- ✓ Commit to implementing the TA activities in agency practice, and making changes necessary in policy, supervision, monitoring, and/or other agency protocols to implement and sustain the new activities
- ✓ Develop or expand an employer database to track job-driven activities in businesses and activities of VR agency staff serving in “Business Account Manager” roles
- ✓ Participate in evaluation activities to measure project outcomes including signing data-share agreements to match/share data, collect data needed to track progress toward objectives, and collect 24 months of data to determine the impact of implementation and employment outcomes

NOTE: The specifics of these requirements become part of the intensive TA agreement between the state VR agency and the JDVRTAC.

Intensive TA Application Periods:

Through this RFP the JDVRTAC is launching the intensive TA application process. The goal is to select 12 state VR agencies to participate in intensive TA in the 2016 fiscal year. Should that number not be achieved, or if the center identifies additional resources, a second round RFP will be planned for the 2016 fiscal year to recruit more state VR agencies for intensive TA. Note: If 12 agencies are selected in the first round RFP and if no additional resources are available, there will not be a second round RFP.. Agencies wishing to participate should aim for the first round. An additional RFP process will occur for the 2017 fiscal year. It will commence during the summer of 2016.

Agencies who apply for intensive TA who are not selected are eligible for assistance from the JD-VRTAC to prepare applications for any subsequent RFP application periods.

Timeline and Instructions for Application:

Please refer to the following timeline for key project dates:

- Webinar announcing the RFP and explaining the process: July 8, 2015
- Request for Participation (RFP) in the Intensive Technical Assistance & Learning Collaborative information released: July 10, 2015
- Electronic submission of the Letter of Intent due: July 24, 2015

*Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC):
Request for Participation in Intensive Technical Assistance & the Learning Collaborative*

- ✓ The application link will be sent to agencies that submit the Letter of Intent. Letters should be emailed to Julisa.cully@umb.edu
- Mandatory Phone Consultation Period: All VR agencies must schedule a conference call with Center staff to discuss participation during the period from July 24 – August 17 prior to submitting their electronic submission form
- Due date for all proposals: August 21, 2015 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time
- Review of Proposals: Center staff will review submitted materials and may request clarification or additional information of VR agencies during the period of August 24 - 28, 2015.
- Mandatory Site Visit: VR agencies meeting selection criteria will be contacted by Sept 4 2015, and a mandatory sit visit will be scheduled prior to selection to participate. During the site visit the team will review the TA request, proposed goals, and evaluation. Site visits will be scheduled between September 14 – October 9, 2015
- Notification of selection to participate in the intensive TA and learning collaborative upon completion of site visit
- Project Year: October 15, 2015 - October 14, 2016

RFP Process and Content

The JD-VRTAC intends to provide intensive TA to as many state VR agencies as possible, but at a minimum to 16 state VR agencies. The JD-VRTAC will recruit and select these agencies through an RFP process.

Intensive TA will be provided by:

- ICI and contracted partners listed below:
 - ✓ Jobs for the Future;
 - ✓ University of Arkansas (U of A);
 - ✓ University of Washington (U of W);
 - ✓ United States Business Leadership Network (USBLN);
 - ✓ Association of University Centers on Disability (AUCD),
 - ✓ Powers, Pyles, Sutter, and Verville, PC (PPSV)

This intensive TA will build upon:

- Relevant research
- Existing emerging practices from VR and other agencies and fields.
- Experiences of SVRA as they move through the implementation process.

Intensive TA will be individualized to meet SVRA needs and abilities to implement changes and will be based on SVRA requests for TA. There is no set curriculum or content to be adopted but rather an individualized approach will be used to help the SVRA effect change.

The Application Content

The RFP contains the following required sections:

*Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC):
Request for Participation in Intensive Technical Assistance & the Learning Collaborative*

- Letter of Intent – Due by July 24, 2015. This must be submitted on agency letterhead and signed by the state VR agency director. The receipt of this will release the link to submit the actual proposal in response to the RFP
- Letter of Commitment on official letterhead and signed by the state VR agency director
- Narrative
- Data Collection Capacity
- TA Project Staff Roster

Letter of Commitment (LOC). This letter should be one to two pages, on official letterhead with the director's signature. It should indicate firm commitment for the VR agency to: participate in all aspects of the Intensive TA; join the Learning Collaborative for one 12-month period; and to support the completion of all activities as defined in the narrative. (A template shall be provided in the electronic RFP form).

Narrative. The narrative section includes open-ended questions. The agency should clearly define the need and requested TA as well as the agency's desired results or goals. Define in as much detail as possible the needs to be addressed including: need for the particular TA requested, the current agency activities related to the TA requested, and the desired end results of the TA. What would success look like? Describe how the VR agency will commit agency resources to implement and complete the intensive TA.

Data Collection Capacity. Provide a description of the agency's capacity to collect data. Explain the case management system used by the agency. Include steps and approvals needed to make changes in data collection. Describe whether the agency is currently matching data with any other systems such as unemployment insurance (UI) data. Identify any policies in place related to participation in a research of data collection effort (i.e., institutional review board, data agreements, etc.)

TA Project Staff Roster. List the names and contact information of the key staff participating in the project. Include staff from all three levels (leadership, mid-management, and direct service) as key staff.

Submission of the RFP Forms

- A Survey Gizmo platform will be used for all applicants to submit forms in response to the RFP. Simply enter in all necessary information and forms and hit the "submit" button
- All submissions are due by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on August 21, 2015 to be considered
- For technical support with the electronic form, contact Julisa Cully at Julisa.Cully@umb.edu

Intensive TA Site Selection Process

- All agencies that complete and submit the application package shall be considered for intensive TA. Each completed application will be rated using the rating summary included in the application package.

*Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC):
Request for Participation in Intensive Technical Assistance & the Learning Collaborative*

- The Center will consider VR agencies' responses to the narrative questions in order to assess the agency capacity to implement job driven strategies and evaluation activities. The Center staff may consult any additional publicly available data about the VR agency, including RSA-911 data or other public sources of information to inform the selection process.
- Notification of selection to receive intensive TA and participate in the learning collaborative of the job-driven intensive TA will be made following the site visits to the agencies.
- Intensive TA will run from project year: October 15, 2015 - October 14, 2016.

Contact Information:

Julisa Cully, PI, Institute for Community Inclusion: Julisa.Cully@umb.edu

Cecilia Gandolfo, PI, Institute for Community Inclusion: Cecilia.gandolfo@umb.edu