

Vocational Rehabilitation and Business Relations: Preliminary Indicators of State VR Agency Capacity

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A quick look:

■ In State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, like in many companies, the customer can be the driving force of the business. However, in VR agencies businesses are the customers. For years, most of the literature written about VR strategies have discussed the “dual customer approach,” where both businesses and VR agency’s clients with disabilities are considered the customers. But what about the structure of the VR agencies? Are they equipped to maintain this business/client relationship approach? This article explores these questions.

Key Findings:

■ An online survey was conducted with 67 SVRA respondents. The respondents were asked about areas including business relations strategies and activities, staffing and organizational structure, marketing, outreach, and business contracts. Below are some of the findings:

- ▶ Most VR agencies provide a wide range of services to businesses:
 - ☐ Work site assessments and assistive technology
 - ☐ Disability awareness and employment law training
 - ☐ Pre-employment services (internships and training)
 - ☐ Financial supports (e.g., Work Opportunity Tax Credit)
- ▶ At least 70% of VR agencies also engage in these business activities:
 - ☐ Networking and establishing business partnerships
 - ☐ Marketing to businesses
 - ☐ Organizing employer recognition events
 - ☐ Hosting business job fairs or hiring events
- ▶ The preferred methods of marketing, outreach, and business contacts include:
 - ☐ Personal contact by VR counselors
 - ☐ Personal contact by the National Employment Team’s single point of contact
 - ☐ Contact through job fairs
 - ☐ Thirty-three of 63 respondents collect data other than contact information from businesses
 - ☐ Overall, agencies rely on mostly printed marketing materials
- ▶ Sixty-nine percent of the respondents indicated they had specialized VR staff that spend most of their time implementing business strategies
- ▶ Almost all the respondents stated that additional VR staff (counselors, job placement specialists, administrators) also have business relations responsibilities

Putting It into Practice:

■ As this survey was being conducted, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act was passed, which added regulations that influenced the structure and capabilities of VR agencies. Some of the more significant changes in regards to this study were:

- ▶ VR agencies are required to expend funds on business services and report on common performance indicators of success for businesses as customers
- ▶ A change in minimum educational requirements for VR counselors from master’s degree to bachelor’s degree
- ▶ VR is now a core program requirement in the workforce development system
- ▶ VR programs are authorized to provide expanded services and education to employers who are interested in hiring people with disabilities

To put this research into practice, businesses can utilize VR agencies in recruiting, job-matching, hiring, and retaining people with disabilities, as well as other educational and accommodation services.

More about this Article (Where to go from here?)

■ After conducting this first survey of the “snapshot” of business relations strategies and approaches by VR agencies, the authors planned to conduct in-depth interviews and additional surveys, which should expand upon the research in this article. This article provides the baseline of this topic.

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