



# INNOVATIVE GUIDED REHABILITATION EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT TRAINING

## *Guide for Administrators, Managers, & Supervisors*

### INTRODUCTION

We have developed this learning guide for vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency leaders and managers at the state office and field service levels. The guide provides an overview of the four iGREET training modules as well as considerations for agency policies and infrastructure that have been shown to produce better employer engagement (EE) outcomes. In an effective EE structure, state VR agency directors and administrators define the “big picture” and expectations for all staff, while VR supervisors clarify the direction for frontline positions and hold them accountable for results.

The four iGREET Modules provide agencies with a comprehensive resource for helping staff develop the knowledge and skills they need for EE. **However, staff training on its own will not produce better outcomes.** We encourage you to pair the training modules with a comprehensive review of agency structure, expectations, and support for staff who are responsible for EE.

This learning guide begins with a review of critical issues for VR leadership, followed by an overview of each of the lessons and the supervisor’s role in the training content implementation.

**Administrators define the “big picture.”**

**Supervisors direct front - line positions and hold them accountable for results.**

### TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Critical Issues for VR Agency Leadership .....	2
The VR Agency Supervisor’s Role Learning Applications and Support for Frontline Staff.....	4
Module 1: Foundations of Employer Engagement.....	5
Module 2: Developing and Maximizing Partnerships for Employer Engagement.....	6
Module 3: Individualizing Employer Engagement .....	8
Module 4: Employment Models to Meet Business Needs .....	9



# VR AGENCY LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT (EE): CRITICAL ISSUES ACROSS 5 DOMAINS

## Domain 1: Vision

---

- » Leadership clearly expresses commitment to EE and business services as a priority for all levels of the agency. This commitment emphasizes a dual customer approach and is reflected in the agency mission statement, unit goals, agency communications, and meeting agendas .
- » Leadership clearly states agency goals for EE activities and outcomes.
- » Leadership clearly states expectations for the agency’s collaboration and communication with American Job Center (AJC) partners around EE, understanding that this requires balance across workforce initiatives, benefits to job seekers, and employers’ hiring needs.
- » Leadership establishes an EE resource allocation plan for level of effort, staff development and support, marketing and communications, and travel.

## Domain 2: Structure

---

- » Leadership establishes a clear model for the agency’s dual customer approach, including:
  - The role of dedicated EE staff
  - [The role of counseling and/or support staff in serving business customers as well as job seekers](#)
- » All staff clearly understand the roles (if any) Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) or other contracted agencies play and how they are expected to [coordinate with VR efforts in serving business customers as well as job seekers](#).
- » The agency writes CRP contracts that incentivize creative, high-quality outcomes with businesses and require contact reporting.
- » All staff clearly understand how EE efforts and data will be coordinated with those of other workforce partners.
- » Leadership establishes a plan for maintaining employer relationships when staff, funding, or provider changes occur.

## Domain 3: Roles/Competencies/Staff Development

---

- » All staff clearly understand EE structure, roles, and responsibilities as well as parameters around speaking on behalf of the agency in business-friendly language.
- » Job descriptions, performance appraisals, competency-based training, and time expectations reflect [EE responsibilities](#) for those involved (including the EE manager/coordinator).
- » Regardless of whether they are directly involved in EE, counselors are expected to use labor market information to inform clients about career options in the development of their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) goals.



## Domain 4: Communication

---

- » Leadership creates an infrastructure for intra-and-inter-agency communication around EE, including a place to raise questions/ concerns, voice ideas, and share new business connections/ leads.
- » Central office level staff develop and share appropriate marketing materials (including a business-facing website) with all staff and contractors involved in EE.
- » Leadership establishes an effective mechanism for sharing job opportunities and other employer needs throughout the agency (and with CRPs as appropriate) as well as a system for sharing information about available job seekers.
- » The agency shares EE outcomes and success stories internally as well as with the business community. Leadership reserves space and time for sharing EE information and activities at agency events/meetings (e.g., staff, team, regional and administrative meetings, trainings, annual conferences ).
- » Leadership ensures mechanisms are in place that allow staff to hear feedback directly from businesses, listening to business concerns and hearing what they have done well.

## Domain 5: Data collection

---

- » The agency establishes an [effective mechanism for collecting and sharing activity and outcome data](#) that includes Workforce Investment and Opportunities Act (WIOA) EE standards (retention, repeat customers, employer penetration) as well as state specific measures, such as job placements resulting from EE.
- » Leadership ensures all staff have information about why EE data is being tracked and how it will be useful in their individual work and for the agency. The agency makes sure data is available in an easily understood format.
- » Leadership establishes clear contractual information about how CRPs are expected to collect and submit EE data.

The following section provides an overview of the iGREET curriculum with specific implications for frontline supervisors. While the details of the training may not be critical to senior leadership, each module delivers clear messages about VR serving business customers as well as job seekers and supports the intent of WIOA. As these messages resonate with VR agency leadership, the following are “big questions ” worthy of consideration:

### **Module 1: Foundations of Employer Engagement**

- » Do we demonstrate a commitment to working with business as a customer in addition to the traditional VR customer (the person with a disability)?

### **Module 2: Developing and Maximizing Partnerships for Employer Engagement**

- » Do we model collaborative relationships and partnerships?

### **Module 3: Individualizing Employer Engagement**

- » Are we equitable in all our practices?

### **Module 4: Employment Models to Meet Business Needs**

- » Do we support innovation and risk-taking?

You must consider these kinds of questions regularly to be sure you are not asking the impossible of supervisors and frontline staff.



## **VR AGENCY SUPERVISORS: LEARNING APPLICATIONS AND SUPPORT FOR FRONTLINE STAFF**

Frontline field supervisors must clearly understand the directions established by VR agency leadership in the five domains: 1) Vision, 2) Structure, 3) Roles and Competencies/Staff Development, 4) Communication, and 5) Data Collection. Supervisors play a primary role in turning vision to reality. As a supervisor, you are directly responsible for staff performance and outcomes within the parameters established by the VR agency administration. You are also responsible for making the needs of direct service staff known to those who can address them. In addition, field supervisors often directly provide services to both business and job seeker customers on a temporary or ongoing basis.

The following portions of this guide will summarize the content of the four modules and 14 lessons of the iGREET curriculum and provide considerations for VR supervisors whose staff participate in the training. As you review the content, we encourage you to consider participating in the training yourself (or working through the online units) to improve your employer engagement (EE) skills and be better able to supervise staff involved in EE activities.

Before approving any training requests from staff, supervisors generally need to know:

- » intended audience for the curriculum
- » appropriate participants within their units
- » expectations for applying new learning
- » EE training already available/provided by the agency
- » current level of specific staff EE competencies
- » expected level of support for EE staff

Following the training, supervisors will play a key role in maximizing the application and impact of the information and exercises. Workforce GPS and their eLearning Task Force developed the Manager's Toolkit, which suggests using questions like these to assist staff in applying content following training<sup>1</sup>:

- » What questions do you have regarding the training content and activities? Do you have any concerns? If so, what are they?
- » After completing the module, were you inspired to make any changes in your daily work? What changes could we consider as a team?
- » What are some ways that we can leverage the training information to improve the quality of the services we provide to businesses?
- » Which state examples stood out most to you? How might we apply a similar approach in our unit?
- » Have you implemented strategies from the training modules in your daily work? If so, how? What results or improvements have you noticed so far?
- » What is an element of your daily work routine or environment that could be improved to better serve business customers?
- » What is one change you would like to make? How would the change make an impact? Who would it benefit the most?

<sup>1</sup><https://disability.workforcegps.org/resources/2019/07/30/19/50/Disability-and-Employment-eLearning-Task-Force>



## Module 1: Foundations of Employer Engagement

### *Lesson 1 – Understanding the Expectations of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Dual Customer Approach*

#### **Content Highlights:**

- » The evolution of Employer Engagement (EE) within vocational rehabilitation (VR)
- » WIOA requirements for serving business customers
- » “Employer” vs. “Business” terminology
- » Advantages of EE to businesses, job seekers, and internal staff
- » Overview of the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP)
- » Establishing VR as an active participant in economic development

#### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Check your knowledge of WIOA regulations and requirements for EE
- » Understand your state’s Unified or Combined WIOA State Plan and how employer services are reported
- » Understand and share your agency’s current expectations regarding participation in the TAP
- » Model relationships with mandatory WIOA partners

### *Lesson 2 – Ethical Considerations in Employer Engagement*

#### **Content Highlights:**

- » Critical role of ethics in EE
- » Recognizing ethical dilemmas in EE
- » Methods and tools for ethical decision making

#### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Be well grounded in the ethical principles and standards relating to EE
- » Ensure that staff involved in EE have access to high-quality, applied training on personal and professional ethical VR standards
- » Be clear about the EE role and related boundaries as well as expectations for potential conflicts of interest and confidentiality
- » Help staff practice using appropriate tools to structure ethical decision making
- » Provide frequent opportunities for staff to discuss actual or theoretical ethical dilemmas that arise during EE and encourage a “speak up” culture where you talk about ethics regularly

### *Lesson 3 – Language and Communication for Effective Employer Engagement*

#### **Content Highlights:**

- » Business terminology and VR vs. business use of language
- » Using and facilitating disability and culturally sensitive language
- » Disclosure of disability in EE
- » Importance of listening in effective communication

#### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Be familiar with business language and terminology as well as disability sensitive language and set an example for your staff
- » Understand the concept of cultural humility and provide opportunities for your staff to learn about different cultures
- » Help business-facing staff practice how to talk about their role without disclosing confidential disability information
- » Model how to listen for needs, concerns, and areas of connection in your interactions with staff



## ***Lesson 4 – Preparing for, Coordinating, and Initiating Employer Engagement***

### **Content Highlights:**

- » Knowing what you're looking for and what you're offering
- » Developing a map of local employers
- » Understanding types, sources, and uses for labor market information (LMI)
- » Researching an employer prior to contact
- » Initiating business contacts through formal or informal connections
- » Developing customized elevator pitches
- » Preparation for addressing business' questions and concerns
- » Understanding and addressing business timing vs. agency timing

### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Ensure that all staff engaged with employers understand what the VR agency can offer and what the desired outcomes are
- » Understand the types of LMI your agency uses and how you and your staff can access this information
- » Provide staff access to training on finding and using LMI, resources for researching employers, and basic EE approaches
- » Include EE skill practice activities in unit meetings (e.g., “how would you answer this business concern?”)
- » Work with your unit to develop strategies for responding to businesses in a timely manner while fulfilling other obligations
- » Demonstrate and support the value of local labor market intelligence and provide opportunities to share it

## **Module 2: Developing and Maximizing Partnerships for Employer Engagement**

---

## ***Lesson 1 – Tapping Internal Expertise and Connections***

### **Content Highlights:**

- » Leveraging connections and resources within VR: EE models, roles, and managing internal data
- » Importance of communication between the supply side (counselors and job seekers) and the demand side ( EE staff and employers)
- » EE as a joint effort with mandatory workforce partners
- » Ensuring consistent and ethical marketing messages across all partners

### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Help your staff understand that a) job seekers with disabilities remain the primary customer for VR agencies, and b) EE/Business Services assist job seekers in finding employment as well as making the VR counselor's job easier
- » Help your staff understand how EE activities are structured in your agency, including roles and responsibilities, communication structures, and data collection expectations
- » Require and facilitate ongoing communication between counseling staff and business-facing staff
- » Build recognition for EE efforts/successes into unit meetings and performance reviews
- » Use a portion of staff meeting time to share business leads and job seeker profiles or create a communication plan for your team to share this information
- » Recognize that employer leads could be as simple as a staff member with a friend or acquaintance in a desired business sector



## ***Lesson 2 – Building an Employer Engagement Portfolio***

### **Content Highlights:**

- » Developing a knowledge base of fundamental laws (including Americans with Disabilities Act, Rehab Act of 1973, Worker’s Compensation, wage and hour laws, & Family Medical Leave Act)
- » Agency-led training opportunities for businesses - topic areas, expertise, and opportunities
- » Strategies for agency messaging, including marketing and outreach materials

### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Be familiar with the employment laws that pertain to different business models
- » Check staffs’ basic knowledge of employment laws and provide fact sheets to assist them in developing such knowledge
- » Provide staff development opportunities to build expertise and offer training as a business service
- » Use recommendations from businesses to identify their training needs and target materials accordingly
- » Assist EE staff in developing or adopting training modules for business audiences
- » Be sure that all marketing materials are vetted and consistent with your agency’s vision and goals

## ***Lesson 3 – Identifying and Cultivating External Partnerships***

### **Content Highlights:**

- » Partnerships with American Job Centers (AJCs), education entities, community rehabilitation providers (CRPs), business and trade associations, economic development, and advocacy organizations
- » Connecting with employers through the National Employment Team (The NET)
- » The role of trust and relationships in cultivating external partnerships
- » Key steps in developing partnerships: the 5 C’s Progression
- » The need to be adaptable and consistent in partnership cultivation

### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Review this section in detail if you are leading this work as this lesson could be directly applicable to your role
- » Team up with your EE staff to establish community relationships, especially level-to-level, and consider who is the “right person” for a specific role/relationship
- » Be prepared with knowledge of your agency’s vision, policies, and procedures so you or your agency’s representative can make meaningful contributions toward partnership goals
- » Assist staff in understanding the progression to partnership so they can identify where they are with partners from AJCs, educational entities, CRPs, business and trade associations, and internal VR staff
- » Consider developing your EE process with input from CRPs to ensure buy-in and use their expertise; emphasize the importance of collaboration, common goals, and shared ethical standards
- » Clarify expectations of staff working with CRPs and put expectations in writing
- » Assist staff in identifying high- impact businesses in your area for targeted collaborations

## ***Lesson 4 – Leveraging External Partnerships***

### **Content Highlights:**

- » Overview of the variety of types and advantages of job fairs
- » Understanding Work-based Learning as a mechanism for partnering with and supporting businesses
- » Understanding the role of business champions



- » Methods for demonstrating business appreciation and recognition
- » Characteristics of effective partnerships and how to repair a broken/challenging relationship

#### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Understand your agency's expectations of the relationship between staff EE efforts and the work being done by contractors (CRPs): How will these efforts be coordinated? How will CRPs share information about the VR agency's dual customer role? How will you support your staff as they work collaboratively with CRPs in EE efforts?
- » Understand how your agency is using job fairs and Work-based learning approaches as part of EE
- » Be aware of the training and materials available for your staff to use in implementing activities, such as job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training
- » Understand and share the expectations for your unit's involvement in partnership activities, such as business recognition
- » Coach your team on keys to developing effective partnerships and be prepared to assist them when things aren't going well

## **Module 3: Strategic and Individualized Employer Engagement**

---

### ***Lesson 1 - Understanding the Employer Landscape***

#### **Content Highlights:**

- » Using labor market information (LMI) to prioritize efforts, understand the workforce needs of the community, determine the usefulness of existing training programs, and identify needs for customized training
- » Using the [Career Index Plus \(TCI+\)](#) labor market tool
- » Sector strategies
- » Using business characteristics to prepare for the initial meeting
- » Learning about businesses in rural areas

#### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Understand the sources of LMI your agency uses and how you and your staff can access this information
- » Provide opportunities for staff to access training on using LMI and tools, especially TCI+
- » Provide staff access to training and resources on identifying the business sectors involved in your local, regional, and state economy
- » Encourage staff to do research to learn all they can about businesses prior to engaging with them
- » Ensure that there are mechanisms for tracking and sharing job seeker career goals with EE staff as well as a system for EE staff to communicate information about the job market with counselors and job seekers ( and within the EE team)
- » Assist staff in collecting and organizing information about a variety of types of businesses in your local area

### ***Lesson 2 - Every Business is Unique: Developing Individualized Business Plans***

#### **Content Highlights:**

- » Understanding the difference between cultural competence, cultural intelligence, and cultural humility
- » Applying cultural humility principles to business relationships
- » Understanding how diversity in the business community impacts EE and outreach
- » Six steps to developing and implementing an Individual Business Plan (IBP)





### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Be familiar with the development and use of IBPs or the equivalent in your agency
- » Ensure there is a system for tracking and communicating employer account information
- » Assist staff in understanding the difference between cultural competence and cultural humility, and how these can impact business relationships
- » Assist staff in identifying the need for a cultural “broker” and finding the appropriate individual for that role
- » Understand and reinforce to staff that relationship development is foundational to EE and takes time

## ***Lesson 3 – Environmental, Economic, and Other Challenging Situations in Employer Engagement***

### **Content Highlights:**

- » Adjusting EE approaches and IBPs in response to changing circumstances and environmental/economic challenges
- » Responding to unethical or legally questionable employer practices

### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Understand and share information about your agency’s response to environmental or economic challenges, for example, will staff need to change roles on a temporary or permanent basis? Will agency staff be involved in community efforts to respond to crises in the moment, or to recover once the crisis has passed?
- » Be aware of the personal impact of these challenges on your staff and provide appropriate support
- » Provide opportunities to share and problem-solve around unethical or legally questionable employer practices

## **Module 4: Employment Models to Meet Business Needs**

---

## ***Lesson 1 – Meeting Employer Needs while Achieving Competitive Integrated Employment***

### **Content Highlights:**

- » Definition and importance of Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) as defined in the WIOA
- » Perspectives on job readiness and how it relates to various employment models
- » Business implications of Supported Employment (SE) and Customized Employment (CE) and how they may be presented to employers
- » Flexible employment options like contract work or temp- to- hire, and the implications for EE and for job seekers

### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Assist your staff in using agency policy documents and/ or other tools to evaluate whether employment opportunities meet the CIE definition
- » Ensure that staff involved in EE have adequate time to invest in developing trusting relationships with business partners
- » Understand how your agency implements SE and share that information with staff
- » Understand how your agency implements CE (if that is the case) and share that information with staff
- » Evaluate staff knowledge of SE and CE
- » Provide opportunities for EE staff to practice discussing SE, CE, and other employment approaches with business customers as well as addressing common employer concerns



## ***Lesson 2 – Meeting Employer Needs through Work-based Learning and Progressive Employment***

### **Content Highlights:**

- » Components of Work-based Learning activities
- » The Progressive Employment (PE) model and its benefits to job seekers and employers
- » Applications of Work-based Learning and the PE model

### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Be well versed in the characteristics of Work-based Learning activities and how they benefit both employers and job seekers
- » Understand and share information about your agency’s involvement in specific Work-based Learning activities, and PE
- » Understand that PE is a comprehensive model and not just Work-based Learning experiences
- » Assist EE staff in developing an approach and script to use in sharing these approaches with employers

## ***Lesson 3 – Meeting Employer Needs through Career Pathways and Apprenticeships***

### **Content Highlights:**

- » Apprenticeships and Career Pathways as dual customer models
- » Identifying opportunities to engage in these programs
- » Effective EE strategies for building apprenticeship and Career Pathways programs

### **Implications for Supervisors:**

- » Be well versed in the characteristics of apprenticeships and Career Pathways and how they benefit both employers and job seekers
- » Be familiar with apprenticeship programs in your state and local area as well as key resources and partnership connections
- » Share information about apprenticeship programs and resources with all staff—those serving job seekers as well as those directly engaged with employers
- » Ensure that staff involved in EE have adequate time to connect with and learn about apprenticeships and Career Pathways programs in your area
- » Assist EE staff in developing an approach and script to use in sharing information about these approaches with employers

The Program on Innovative Rehabilitation Training on Employer Engagement is a project of ExploreVR at the Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston. ExploreVR offers VR agencies easy and convenient access to a range of VR research, related data, training and tools for planning, evaluation, and decision-making. Funding for this project is provided by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Grant #H263C190012.

