Rapid Engagement Team Approach (RETA) Project

An Informational Webinar for VR Agencies

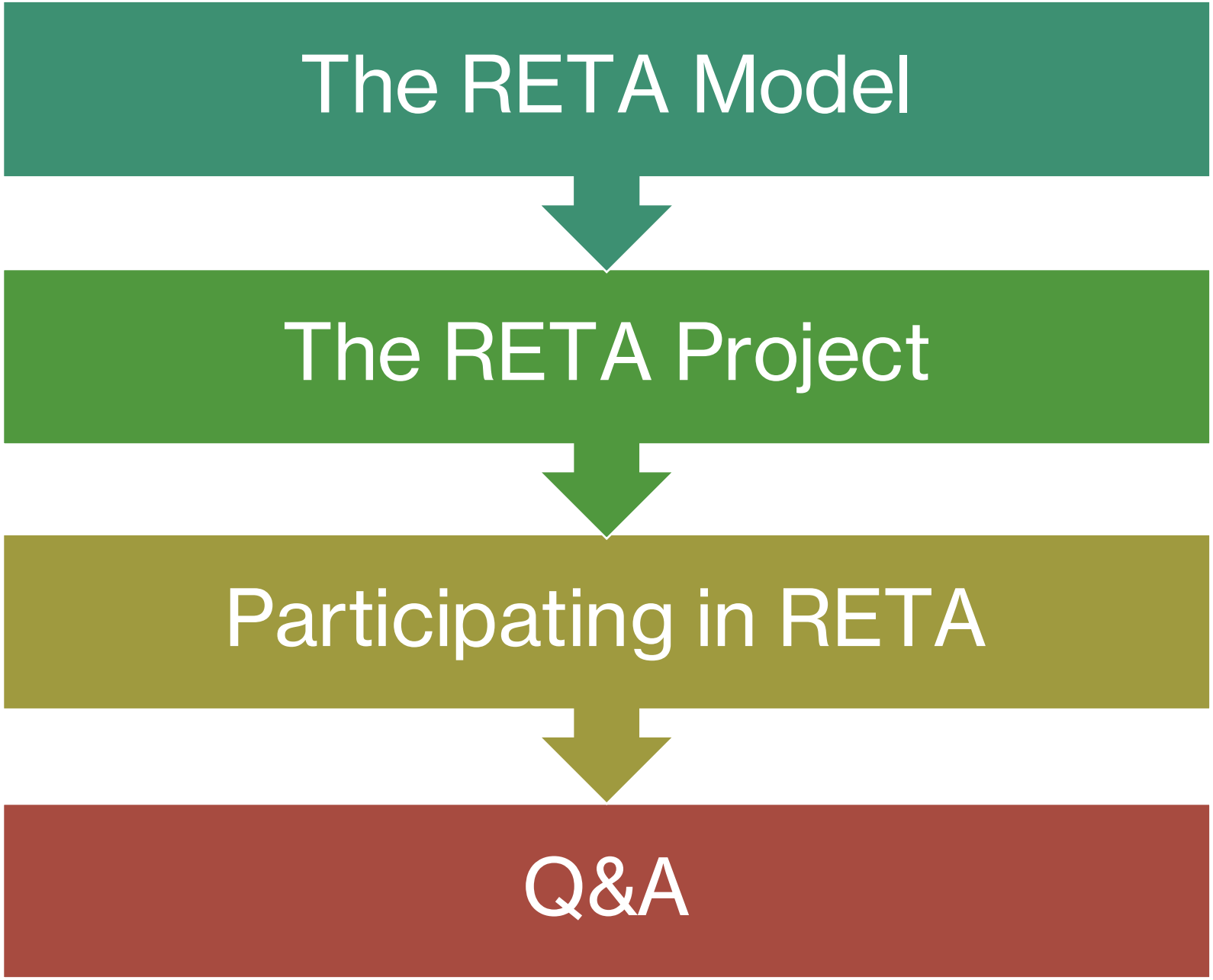
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Webinar Agenda



The RETA Model

RETA Components

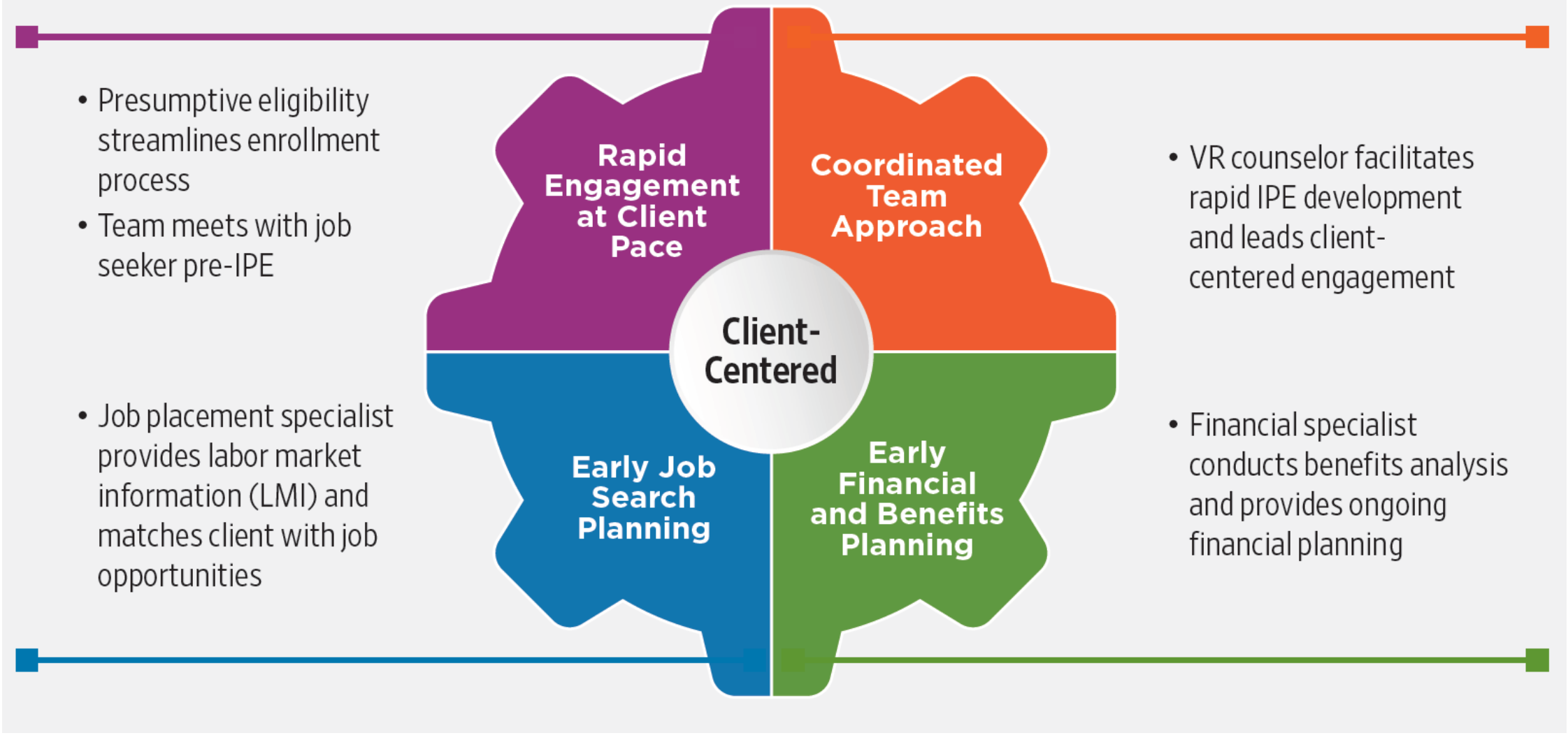
Why RETA? Research and Application

The RETA Model: Background

An **evidence-based** usable **innovation** developed and tested in Kentucky and Minnesota under the SGA Project

Designed for VR applicants on **SSDI** with two key components: **Rapid Engagement** and a **Team Approach**

What is the Rapid Engagement Team Approach?



The RETA Model Components in Detail

Rapid Engagement

Eligibility determination for VR services within a limited number of days (instead of up to 60 days), using:

- Presumptive eligibility
- Procedural review
- Project performance goal alignment

Teaming Approach

Early direct introduction of the team in pre-IPE team meeting(s) with the client and at least:

- Counselor
- Employment specialist
- Financial (benefits) planner for early and frequent work incentives planning

Why RETA?

Findings from the SGA Project Lived Experience Study

What VR Customers said

Pace

- Ready to work
- VR process is too slow

Complex Decisions

- Needs/goals v. risks

SSDI

- Rules are confusing
- Fear losing benefits

Job Placement

- Want targeted help to find jobs

Rapid Engagement Team Approach (RETA)



Rapid Engagement

Coordinated Team Approach





Early Financial and Benefits Planning

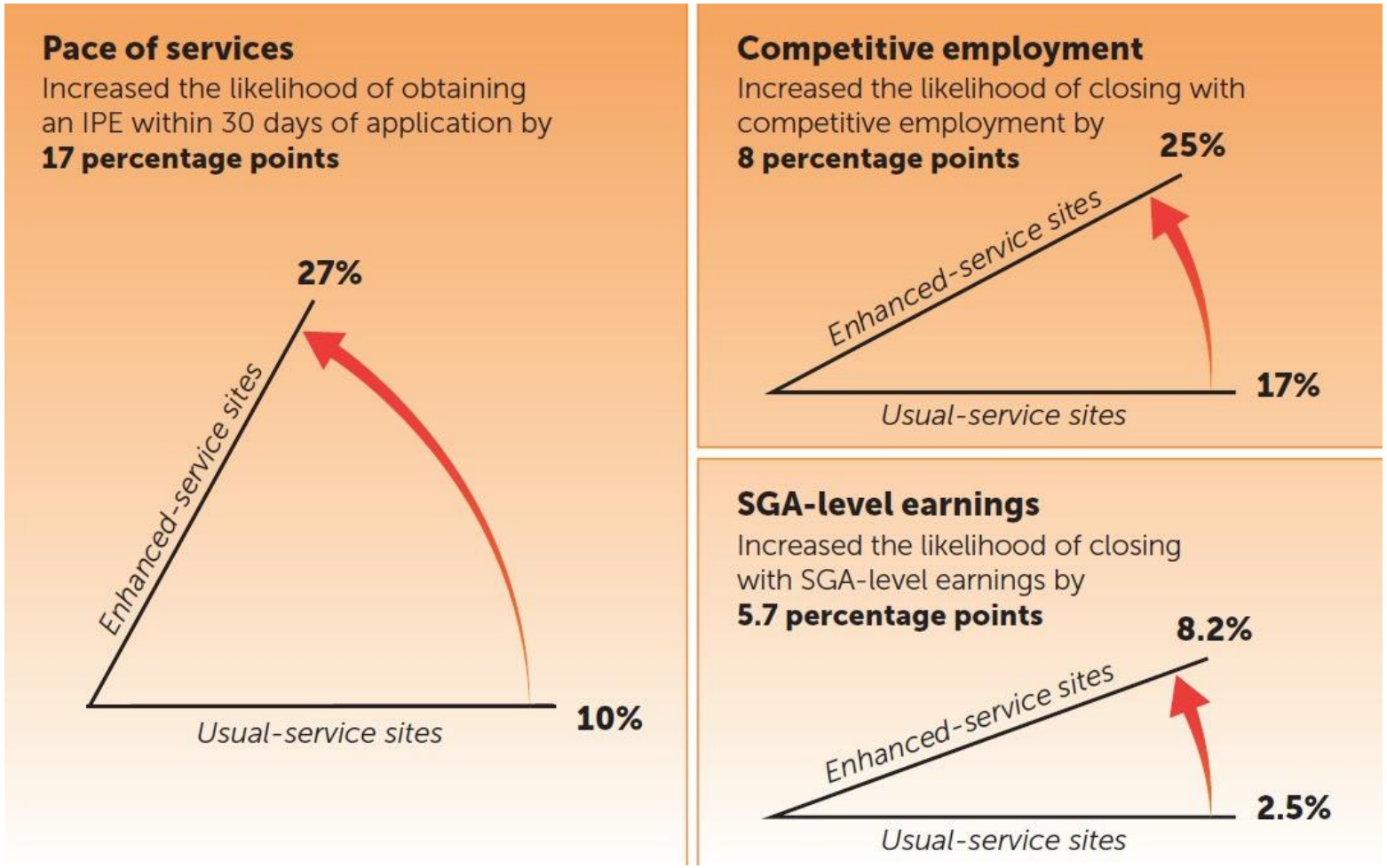
Early Job Search Planning



Source: Taylor, A. B., & Blackburn, N. (2020). “It makes me feel part of the society”: Return-to-work decisions of SSDI beneficiaries. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, *53*(3), 319–333. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3233/JVR-201108

Why RETA?

Findings from the SGA Project Randomized Controlled Trial



Source: Innovating Kentucky's VR system and improving SSDI client outcomes: Findings from the SGA Project demonstration (Mathematica Research Brief) https://www.explorevr.org/sites/explorevr.org/files/files/Research-Brief-Kentucky-VR-Innovations.pdf

Why RETA?

Findings from a Follow-up Study on the SGA Project

After 2 years, participants were still more likely to:

- Be employed
- Earn higher wages
- Have incomes above SGA

Source: Scott, K. (2021). Evaluating the Long-Term Effectiveness of the SGA Enhanced Services Model in Kentucky: A Follow-Up Study on the SGA Demonstration Project. *Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Journal*, *10*(2). https://doi.org/10.52017/001c.26136

Why RETA?

For You

Intentionally designed to utilize existing services available through the VR agency, either directly from agency staff or through existing providers.

- VRCs
- CWICs/benefits planners
- Job developers/job placement staff

Benefits VR agencies through increased:

- Employment outcomes
- SSA Cost Reimbursement
- Improved working relationships among specialists
- Increased client satisfaction among SSDI beneficiary pop.

The RETA Project

- What is the RETA Project?
- Project Goals
- Project Objectives
- Lived Experience Study

What is the RETA Project?

- 3-year Development Project (September 2025-August 2028)
- Funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant number 90DPEM0014)
- Promoting implementation of an evidence-based VR model (Rapid Engagement Team Approach):
  - Designed to improve outcomes for SSDI beneficiaries
  - Developed and tested in Kentucky and Minnesota under the SGA Project
  - Researched using a randomized controlled trial and a qualitative lived experience study.

NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this presentation do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, HHS, or the Federal Government.

RETA Project Goals

Expand use of the Rapid Engagement Team Approach

To enhance VR services for SSDI customers

To improve engagement, employment, and wages

To allow more individuals with disabilities to reach economic independence

RETA Project Objectives

- **Engage 3 VR agencies** to implement, refine, and enhance RETA
- Host a **learning collaborative** and **provide site-level supports** to identify and address barriers to implementation
- Gather **perspectives of VR participants** to embed lived experience into RETA
- Create and disseminate a **toolkit** to facilitate wider use of RETA among VR agencies

RETA Lived Experience Study

Goals:

- Inform implementation of RETA
- Embed voices of people with lived experience into project activities, tools, and other products

Activities:

- Secondary analysis of SGA Project interviews
- Interviews and focus groups with current and past VR participants who are SSDI beneficiaries

Role of VR Agencies:

- Disseminate study materials to help recruit participants

The RETA Project: Outcomes and Outputs



- **Anticipated outcomes**
  - a) increased adoption of RETA, which is informed by
  - b) greater understanding of SSDI beneficiaries' lived experiences, leading to
  - c) an increased number of SSDI beneficiaries achieving earnings above SGA.
- **Expected Products**
  - A **toolkit** with implementation guides, a training curricula, and fidelity measures,
  - A RETA **Learning Collaborative** providing peer-to-peer support for implementation sites, and
  - **First-person accounts** of paths toward achieving employment.

Participating in RETA

- What ICI is Offering
- What Capacities Do Participating Agencies Need?
- What Commitments Will Participating Agencies Make?
- What Factors Should You Consider for Pilot Site/s?
- The Application Process

What ICI is Offering

Baseline Assessment. ICI will assist participating VR agencies in completing a self-assessment to determine implications for embedding RETA in their service delivery system and to identify anticipated implementation needs.

Learning Collaboratives (LC). ICI will use a quarterly LC strategy with all participating VR agencies to connect adopters in peer-to-peer exchange learning, facilitate cross-agency knowledge transfer, address common issues, and generate solution. One LC per year will be in-person.

Intensive Technical Assistance (TA) will be provided to participating VR agencies to identify barriers, troubleshoot challenges, and facilitate agency implementation site(s).

Online discussion forum with resources and tools site housed on Microsoft Teams, where users in participating sites can pose questions, share information with other LC members, and access online resources and tools.

What Capacities Do Participating Agencies Need?

- Capacity for skilled financial counseling, including benefits planning to educate SSDI beneficiaries on available work incentives
- Capacity for business relations and job development, using local, real-time labor market information for customers to make informed choices
- Office/s that serve a sufficient number of individuals receiving SSDI benefits
- Agency leadership support of and commitment to full engagement in the project for the period of the project

What Commitments Will Participating Agencies Make?

Pilot the RETA Model approach in 1-2 sites within your state
Attend quarterly Learning Collaborative (LC) meetings.
Contribute input and feedback into development of toolkit materials (via discussions and surveys)
Distribute outreach materials to participating clients for lived experience interviews.
Track key data elements for evaluation and improvement of the project

What Factors Should You Consider for Pilot Site/s?

Availability of financial counseling (incl. benefits planning) for the area.

Availability of business engagement/job placement services for the area.

Capacity and willingness of proposed site VRCs, financial counselors, and job developers to engage in implementing RETA model.

The number of clients on SSDI served in the area the past three years as an indicator of participants for the implementation site.

The Application Process

Apply online: https://bit.ly/RETA-Application. The deadline for applications is May 8, 2026.

You will be asked about capacities for financial & benefits counseling, business engagement & job development, and data tracking.

We also ask about the size of the proposed site/s (overall population and number of SSDI applicants).

Selected SVRAs will be notified by June 1, accompanied by a participation agreement document to be completed by the SVRA and the ICI.

SVRAs not selected will be notified via email shortly thereafter.

Questions?



Thank You!

We appreciate you joining us for this webinar and for considering applying to be part of the RETA Project.

If you have questions or want to talk individually, please contact us!

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ExploreVR.org/reta

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