

ACCESS TO TRAINING/CAREER PATHWAYS

Four state agency practitioners and experts in the field presented on the event's third panel about **Access to Training/Career Pathways**. This panel showcased their leadership and progress in this area. This presentation was followed by small and large group discussions, and report-outs about emerging practice and recommendations to the field.

Emerging Practices

- » **Run a STEM camp.** In Kentucky, the Career Pathways program worked with the local community college and school systems to run STEM camps, exposing clients to information and careers involving science, technology, engineering and math.
- » **Partner with the general agencies and community colleges with Career Pathways.** Kentucky and Oregon shared their collaborative experiences in shaping career pathway models together with community colleges, and all 4 presenting states discussed their success in working with the general VR agency.
- » **Train employers (and include HR continuing education units).** This helps businesses meet their objectives, and helps VR agencies develop stronger business relationships. Offering HR training also builds the VR agency's leadership role among its partners.
- » **Offer apprenticeship program models.** Apprenticeship opportunities are now recognized by agencies as a premier "learn and earn" model to support individuals in meeting career objectives.
- » **Expose staff to new business environments.** Agencies have been re-assessing the negative or outdated assumptions they hold about some types of work (e.g., manufacturing). Some environments and opportunities have changed a lot in the past 20 years, and may be worthy of a second look for potential partnerships.
- » **Hold reverse job fairs.** Several states participating in this meeting reported success with this activity: Kentucky on the panel, and others in the discussion.
- » **Engage businesses with career pathway development** through career pathway planning or advisory committees.
- » **Experiment with business enterprise programs (BEPs).** The Georgia agency developed a partnership with one BEP operator in which youth gained experience in running a cafeteria. Reported outcomes were that students became more independent in work activities after their experience.
- » **Advocate for progressive employment.** This strategy is increasing in use by agencies as a model to increase work experience and placement, and incorporates work experience strategies.

In June 2018, professionals from 29 American vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies convened in San Antonio, Texas to discuss employment outcomes for individuals who are blind and visually impaired. The purpose of this forum was two-fold: to learn from each other's experiences implementing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and to enhance VR's success increasing employment outcomes for people who are blind and visually impaired in light of WIOA's vision.

In addition, these VR representatives came together to identify the emerging practices and their recommendations to the field in the following categories:

- 1) Collaborative Implementation of WIOA
- 2) Youth-Focused Initiatives
- 3) Access to Training/Career Pathways
- 4) Use of Labor Market Information
- 5) Collaborative Business Engagement

Recommendations for the Field

- » **Include medical and health care professionals** in STEM activity planning.
- » **Explore Project Search with youth.**
- » Engage more in the [Career Pathways Community of Practice](#) with your partners.
- » **Establish pilots and slowly expand** as Kentucky has done in two local areas.
- » Establish the role of **Career Pathway Coordinators** who function as subject matter experts for clients interested in a specific career pathway.
- » **Develop videos** for employers so they can observe how individuals that are blind perform certain tasks.
- » **Develop online resources on progressive employment.**
- » **Consider labor market information** when developing work-based learning experiences.

Panelists

CINDY ROBERTS

Virginia Department for the Blind and Visually Impaired:
career pathways grants

CORA MCNABB

Kentucky Office for the Blind: career pathways grants

SHIRLEY ROBINSON

Georgia VR: building a Project SEARCH partnership

MORGAN RINCON

Oregon Commission for the Blind (OCB): partnership with community colleges at OCB training centers

Funder information

The Job-Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC) is a national center housed at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston. The center and its materials are funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration within the US Department of Education under grant #H264A140002.

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Author information

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**Institute for
Community
Inclusion**

These briefs are part of the ExploreVR project at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. ExploreVR offers vocational rehabilitation agencies easy and convenient access to a range of VR research, related data, and tools for planning, evaluation, and decision-making.

[Visit ExploreVR](http://www.ExploreVR.org) for additional resources from these presenters and others at the forum.

www.ExploreVR.org