

COLLABORATIVE BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Four state agency practitioners presented a panel about **Collaborative Business Engagement**. This presentation was followed by small and large group discussions, and report-outs about emerging practices and recommendations to the field.

Emerging Practices

- » **Create a unified brand.** Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) joined with the state workforce and general VR agency to create a single brand—“Virginia Career Works”—with a shared marketing campaign and menu of services.
- » **Have businesses sell the message.** In Pennsylvania, business representatives tour other businesses to see how VR has helped them meet their staffing needs
- » **Jointly approach businesses with partners.** In Massachusetts, teams talk to businesses to clarify how the MA Commission for the Blind is different from the Carrol Center and Perkins School for the Blind, but also how these entities work together as the Vision Consortium.
- » **Use assistive technology (AT) specialists to do business outreach.** The Oregon Blind WIOA team includes 4 AT staff working in conjunction with the 2 business specialists.
- » **Invite businesses to partner in job fairs.** Harvard University co-hosts a job fair along with Massachusetts Commission for the Blind for blind and visually impaired (BVI) job seekers.
- » **Clarify roles of business service staff and job seeker service staff.** Oregon Blind has established a job seeker portfolio that needs to be completed before referral for job development.
- » **Make WIOA business service teams a partnership, not a handoff.** Virginia DVBI uses the metaphor of a tandem bicycle to illustrate the partnership among VR, VA, Title 1 programs, literacy programs, etc.
- » **Focus on state employment.** Both Pennsylvania and Virginia have been successful in assisting BVI job seekers in accessing employment in state government.

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

- » **Involve businesses in business service team meetings.**
- » Be sure that partner agencies are **using accessible equipment**, and that they are **co-enrolling BVI clients**.
- » Establish a **strong communication structure** between business service and job seeker service team members.
- » **Use videos** to show business groups how BVI people complete certain job tasks.
- » **Incorporate business services into pre-services training.**
- » **Collaborate across state lines** with job fairs, Society for Human Resource Management meetings, etc.
- » [*Use business engagement materials available on ExploreVR.*](#)
- » Ask businesses to take part in **low-risk activities** (e.g., informational interviews, tours, reverse job fairs).

Panelists

CINDY ROBERTS

Virginia Department for the Blind and Visually Impaired: collaborative business services

JOE STRECHAY

Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation: webinars, videocasts, and training

JOEY BUIZON

Massachusetts Commission for the Blind: working with the business community in partnership with BVI-serving entities

MORGAN RINCON

Oregon Commission for the Blind: co-location with American Job Centers, collaboration with Washington Blind and general VR

Funder information

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Author information

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**Institute for
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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