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UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON
UMB-ENGAGING BUSINESSES FROM A BLINDNESS PERSPECTIVE: NEW JERSEY’S DEVELOPMENT OF A BUSINESS RELATIONS UNIT

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 >> Hello, everyone. Good afternoon. Good morning. And welcome to the Explore VR webinar. If you're calling in right now, please mute your phones. All right. Welcome, everyone.

Welcome to the Explore VR webinar, Engaging Business from a Blindness Perspective: New Jersey's Development of a Business Relations Unit. My name is Katie Allen from the Institute for Community Inclusion. And I'm going to go over a few things with you before we begin.

So we ask participants listen to today's webinar through computer. Or if you call in, please mute your phones and please use listen only option. You can communicate using the comment box in the upper right-hand corner of your screen. Muting your phone is important so you can avoid broadcasting any background noise in your environment through the webinar. If you can't find your phone's mute button, press star pound. If you experience any connection issues, first try closing all other applications and logging out and logging back into the webinar. If you continue to experience any technical difficulties, you can type the question in the comments box above in the right corner of your screen or email me at katie.allen@umb.edu. And we reserve time at the end to address your questions and comments. We encourage you to type the questions and comments box in the right corner of the screen throughout the presentation, and we'll address the questions in the end. If you like the copy of the PowerPoint presentation, you can download it now in the lower right corner of your screen and also find these slides on ExploreVR.org. At the end much the webinar there will be a link to the evaluation that will appear on your screen. Follow this link to complete it. If you're a certified certification counselor, you must complete the evaluation to complete this credit. This webinar is worth 1CRC credit. This webinar will be archive at-- after the slide webinar. When you Explore VR, you can find information about all of our archived webinar as well as upcoming. Neil McNeil will be your host for today's webinar. And Neil will explain the project and introduce your presenter in the objectives for today's webinar. Neil?

>> Thanks very much, Katie. And welcome, everyone. Um, to start off, let me review some of the objectives for this webinar. First of all, we're going to explain the goals, partners, and TA and the learning collaborative associated with our vocation of technical center. We're going to describe New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired background and services. We're going to explain New Jersey CBVI's JD-VRTAC project. We're also going to discuss New Jersey CBVI's project purpose and goals. We're going to describe New Jersey blind project implementation, their accomplishments so far. We're also going to share some of these challenges and lessons learned from the New Jersey CBVI's JD-VRTAC project. We'll get the current status. What is the most helpful from the technical assistance and learning collaboratives from the learning process. And we'll share the next steps future direction and goals.

JD-VRTAC goal is quite straightforward. To improve the skills of state VR agency staff, other rehabilitation professionals and providers of VR services who are trained to provide job driven VR services and supports with PWD employers and customized training providers. It has four topic areas, business engagement, employer supports, Labor Market Information, and customized training providers.

We have a number of partners with this grant. And this slide shows you a list of those partners. Jobs for the Future, University of Washington, Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation. U.S. Business Leadership Network, Association of University Centers on Disabilities. And we collaborate with the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind and the Technical Assistance Center Collaborative.

Our feedback assistance centers provides three types of TA. Intensive, VR agencies participated in one of our cohort project. Intensive TA and 9 agencies participated in cohort 2 projects. Intensive TA, are members of the learning collaborative. We also do targeted technical assistance. Several agencies have requested targeted TA related to one of our four job driven topical areas. The center is hosting communities of practice and forum on relevant issues. We have universal technical assistance and we host archive webinars on topics related to the four job technical areas and we present presentation at CSAVR and NCSAB. As part of receiving intensive technical assistance, states attended 2-3 in-person learning collaborative meetings to provide project updates, collaborate across agencies, and participate in topical discussions. Learning collaborative states participate in conference calls with their cohorts to discuss job-driven topics. 18 state VR agencies are part of the JD-VRTAC learning collaborative. With that, I'm happy to introduce Amanda Gerson from the New Jersey's Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Amanda.

>> Thank you so much, Neil and Katie. So like Neil said, I'm the Coordinator of Vocational Rehabilitation and Transition Services with the New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. I'm going to apologize in advance if the sound of sirens make the way through the webinar. I'm in downtown Newark and our windows are not soundproof.

A little bit about the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, we are a separate VR agency from our general agency. And we are housed in the Department of Human Services. We provide lifespan services to individuals who are blind, deaf blind, and vision impaired from infant all the way up through education services where we contract the school districts to provide braille instruction related education, instruction to our students as well as transition services, vocational rehabilitation services, and our independent living and older blind.

Our services are largely provided in house. We have our own mobile instructors, rehab teacher, teacher that are visually impaired. We have our own technology specialists. And the services we contract out are related to job development placement. Support employment as well as assistive technology instruction.

We have three primary service centers. Newark, Freehold, and Cherry Hill. We have a satellite office in Atlantic City and we have our Joseph Kohn Training Center in New Brunswick.

To give a little bit of a background as to CBVI's history are with business engagement, in about 2007 and 2008. Wed had one individual allocated to engaging with businesses, primarily in focusing on developing relationships for internships and job opportunities for our college graduates.

That individual, as many of you have probably experienced, wound up getting pulled into other projects. And we did experience-- and eventually her position was reassigned and that unit cease to exist. In 2013 to 2015, as part of your comprehensive needs assessment at the time, CBVI went under a very large strategic planning initiative. And the development of the business engagement unit was listed one of the strategic initiatives that CBVI felt was an important area to focus on.

It wound up wonderfully, coordinating with the passage of WIOA and business engagement mandate. And so when the opportunity to apply for the JD-VRTAC technical assistance, collaborative came about, we jumped on the chance to be a part of one of the first cohort.

Because we knew that we were going to be embarking on a new initiative, a rather large undertaking and the technical assistance is really going to be invaluable as we started this process.

So we were part of the project for both year one and year two. And our goal shifted slightly from the first to the second. Our first year goals were really focused on two main areas. One, to accomplish the Business Relations Unit. Like I said, no unit existed at this point. Any requests from businesses to do any sort of education or engagement were provided kind of on an ad hoc basis. And most business services were related to an individual who had a job or had a job offer.

So our goals at that point were to coordinate efforts around developing this unit, improve our marketing strategy, and create marketing materials to really operationalize the unit, including pleasing the efforts and obviously the ultimate outcome to increase the number of our consumers who were able to get employment or internship opportunities from these relationships.

The second primarily goal for year one was incorporate Labor Market Information on an operational level.

So we provided Labor Market Information training to staff. And also undertook evaluation of that training and how it was working.

For year two, we looked at solidifying the Business Relations Unit. We had some delays, and there were definitely goals from our year one that we didn't fully meet, things that due to logistics we had to shift. So we were looking at furthering our marketing materials, finalizing our policies and propers. We decided to utilize Salesforce for our data tracking and to really start to conduct Business Relations Unit activities and events on a larger scale. Around Labor Market Information, we did do a follow-up survey. And we looked to expand the training and resources available to our consumers by taking advantage of training on the current TCI plus.

So to talk about our project implementation, I'm going to start with our Labor Market Information training because that was a little bit more straightforward. In May 2016 we created and implemented a pre-assessment based off of a survey that Pennsylvania created around Labor Market Information. So following that we provides a LMI for all of our vocational rehabilitation counselor as well as advisers and managers. BRU is our Business Relations Unit.

So with that, it was a full day training, and what we did is we utilized that opportunity to introduce our involvement in the JD-VRTAC to introduce our plans for Business Relations Unit. And then we brought in two primary trainers for the rest of that training. We brought in a he is at that Titian, somebody, from the New Jersey Department of Labor and workforce development. To talk about Labor Market Information, our states online resources, and what our initiatives were in our state. And we had Mary from ICI come and speak about using really utilizing that Labor Market Information as a counseling tool.

That was our big, really focus training around LMI. But over the course of the next year, I really, took every opportunity to remind them about LMI information and its use of the counseling tool at every chance I could.

We had initiated a VRTAC 101 series, a back to basics training staff development series for our staff. And so when I was talking about IPE development, goal development and form choice and business engagement, I always try to tie in where Labor Market Information could be utilized and where it was relevant to the entire counseling process. And then in June of in year, we were a part of the business engage the training specifically targeting blindness agencies by Mississippi state University. I see a couple of our friends are on their. Hi, Lisa. Hi Michelle. They continued to reinforce the importance of Labor Market Information in business engagement.

To speak a little bit about the outcome, we, when we did the same assessment one year later, we had staff turnover in that time and we had new counselors come onboard. So the number of respondents and responded to the survey did change. But overall, it's heartening to see that we did see an increase in our VR counselor self-report of the understand and their use of labor market use in that year. And particularly they acknowledged that, their knowledge had been expanded. They were using it for a wider array of purposes. For example, we saw a decrease in the use of Labor Market Information to dissuade consumers from unrealistic vocational rehab goal. but we saw increase in them using it for things like understanding the career pathways, the training requirements are to a particular job. What skills and knowledge are required.

We also saw them using a wider range of LMI tools. So in year one, most people identified that they were using the O net to access Labor Market Information. When we did the post assessment a year later, we saw that they were using some of the U.S. Department of Labor tools. They were using the New Jersey tools that we identified. So that was definitely -- we felt like we met our goal in terms of educating our counselors.

One of our, one of the down sides, to the project was we really didn't have a way to evaluate what the impact was due to limitations of our case management system. But at least we were at least we were getting from our counselors that they were understanding what Labor Market Information was, and what the value of using it with their consumers were.

And then our next step that we've been planning for the past few months is the implementation of the current X plus which slated to occur in 2017.

Okay. So this is the big one. We are going to our Business Relations Unit development and staffing. So I know that this, the challenge and delays around this are not unique to New Jersey. While we signed onto be a part of the JD-VRTAC in October, and we were ready to go, we, I think, were able to post for the positions in January of 2016. And in May, June of 2016 our first two business relations specialist staff were hired. Collaboratively with the staff, with resources provided by the JD-VRTAC from other states, we developed a job description and performance metrics that matched what our unique agency goals were. We started at this time to do outreach to businesses, utilizing a lot of the resources from the have had JD-VRTAC and identified education first as a priority. For us we felt there are so many myths and misconceptions about how people who are blind and vision impaired in the work force, we felt that educating our business partners was our #1 priority. Giving them the information they need to confidently hire people who are blind and vision impaired as well as give them the tools necessary around assistive technology and accessibility before we then even started talking about any sort of talent sourcing or job placement services for them.

In January 2017, we did have one staff added to our team. But pretty much simultaneously, one went out on leave. It was also during this time that I was, directly supervising the Business Relations Unit. And it became apparent national unit needed more guidance than I could provide in my current role.

So we recognized the need for a business relations supervisor to help work more closely with the unit and provide strategic direction and assistance and so at that point, we did posted for a position.

I'm happy to say that last month, our Business Relations Unit was fully staffed with three business relations specialists and one business relations supervisor. So this is about two years after our project was implemented.

Our final staffing that is on my wish list is dedicated assistive technology specialist. We have been working closely with our assistive technology unit to pull a technology position specialist which is the title in our agency to come and provide demonstrations, to provide technology and accessibility focus segment of a workshop if it's requested, and then also to do any accessibility assessments that we may need for our business partners. But at this point we don't have anybody specifically dedicated to our unit.

So my hope is that in the future, we can bring somebody onboard with that. Obviously, our business relations specialists have been doing targeted outreach, reaching out, cold calling, going about networking in our job fairs, in targeted hiring events. They're networking within our Department of Labor and workforce development. We have targeted industry partnerships around specific industry sectors in New Jersey that bring together businesses and the larger workforce system to address hiring needs. So they've been networking through those means.

And then just going out into the community and then also we're getting referrals, we're getting directly reached out to by businesses to provide of services. But then kind of our bigger outreach efforts are outlined here in this slide. In July and August when our team first came together, we did focus on providing the TAP training to get them onto the talent acquisition portal to train our counselors on how to use the talent acquisition portal and to enable our consumers to get on there. So that was a summer, fall initiative where everybody was trained. And we got some consumers on there.

In October of 2016, we had our nurse NDEAM month. And because our business contacts at that point were relatively small, we did not participate in any larger events. But we did leverage some of our closer partners to come in and provide consumer focused events with, within each of our three offices.

We were able to provide mock interview and resumé review with one of our business partners down in the south jersey office. And we were able to have a human resources and accessibility professional from one of our partners up north come in and talk to some much our recent college graduates about entering the workforce and what accommodations requests look like at a large corporate organization for employment.

We also, continued to partner with our general agency, the division of vocational rehabilitation services and participated in a schedule hiring event down south. Then in early 2017, we were reached out to by Princeton University and we are providing a monthly accessibility training event collaboratively with them which has been a great opportunity to develop that partnership.

In May 2017 we held our first business summit where we invited ten of our business partners to come in and had a morning workshop on what the Commission for the Blind does and really dispel some of myths and misconceptions to educate them what our unit has to offer them and to provide some accessibility training.

In June 2017 we had our first job fair as well as schedule a hiring event with the division of vocational rehabilitation services. That was a busy month. Our job fair was very successful in terms of we, it was well attended and well prepared for. And we did have approximately 15, 10 to 15 employers participate. One challenges we had was given the lack of just a range of business partners we had at the time, we had difficulty matching what our consumer, what type of jobs our consumers were looking for with what type of partners we were pulling in. So unfortunately we did not have any hires as a result of that first job fair. But it was a very positive event for both the business partners that participates as well as our consumers that participated.

And then, this month, it is our first NDEAM month as a full unit. And the team has been keeping busy. We are participating in three disability mentoring days. And we today actually, collaborative business summit with our general agencies, business engagement unit. We had a great unofficial disability event with the Shop Rite. At the end five of individuals sat with interviews for various positions. And we've also done a number of other awareness events and outreach events.

So things are coming along well. In terms of our accomplishments, we are fully staffed as of August-- August-September with our three business relations specialists and sun supervisor. I already reviewed our Labor Market Information successes where the VRC counselors did increase in frequency type and attitudes toward use with consumers. We also launched a career exploration center pilot in our New York office which was a space within the office with computers and, like a table and what not to hold small group trainings such as interview skills or job exploration and accessing Labor Market Information. And so that launched this summer. And we had a couple of activities there.

And then finally our marketing materials and Salesforce is in process. I consider that an accomplishment as many of you know, there are definitely, there's definitely a good amount of red tape involved in some of these initiatives. And so it took a while to get some of these off the ground. So it's coming along. And we have solid drafts and Salesforce is being customized for us as we speak. Some of the challenges and lessons learned.

Recruitment and staffing for the unit is, I feel like a perpetual challenge. It is something that, um, I've heard many of our other learning collaborative complete ECHO as one of the biggest challenges. We did choose to go the route of our business relations specialist as vocational rehab counselors who had a particular interest and/or prior experience within the business community.

But to find those within our, to find those within our agency, was a challenge. We did wind up going outside for one of our hires. Other agency changes and initiatives also led to limited resources for the project implementation. Obviously doing this at the same time at all of the other WIOA implementation challenges was as well as the number of other strategic plan initiatives that were happening, we just found that sometimes we got pulled in a separate direction and one of our goals got put on the back burner.

I think our marketing materials is an example of that. But now that we have a fully staffed unit, we do have more bandwith to focus on needs.

Another challenge is communication and collaboration both internally and externally. This includes really educating our VR counselors on what the purpose of the unit is. Working collaboratively with our business relations specialist to identify consumers who are job seeking, what their interests are, what railroad abilities are, so if opportunities arise from one of our business partner seeking candidates that we have that information readily available. But at the same time, having them understand that our primary focus is not job development and job placement, it's a very new concept for a lot of our counselors. And so clearly identifying what our unit is, is different.

Similarly, building relationships with our other workforce partners, I am very lucky that the head of the Business Relations Unit over at division of vocational rehabilitation services is wonderful and collaboration minded. So we've been able to maintain an open line of communication between our or agencies to work collaboratively on certain initiatives and to really capitalize on the amount of manpower that we have because there's not a ton of us. And it's not a big state. But it's a populated state with a lot of businesses.

So if we can work collaboratively, we all recognize that that is to the benefit of both of our agencies and the people that we serve.

Similarly working with our other workforce partners, for us just not being within the Department of Labor and workforce development is a challenge. But we have done some strategic outreach to the business engagement unit within labor and workforce development as well as we have a member on our state rehab council. So we've been able to make important connections and start that conversation in working more deeply with our labor and workforce partners.

I spoke already about keeping the focus on business oriented education and services, not just job placement specialist. This also goes for some of our business relations specialists, too because they were VR counselors prior to coming into their new role. Sometimes it's easy to fall back into the counselor role, the client-focused role. But kind of refocusing onto the business oriented mindset, the education oriented mindset with the hiring opportunities will come once our businesses are comfortable.

obvious the challenges tracking date a the Salesforce process in acquiring the software started in the spring of 2016. but there were a couple of bumps and questions and delays with the development and acquisition of that software. But it is now being customized for our unit with the implementation targeted for early 2018.

The benefit to, or the benefiting cost to a lot of these delays were that, other units within the Department of Labor and workforce development were already in the process of acquiring this software and getting an app created for them.

So when our office information technology saw our request for the software and what our justification was, a couple bells and whistles went off. They realized there were a bunch of us asking for Salesforce to do the same thing. And they actually brought us altogether in a room. And so whereas the primary account holder is the labor and workforce development business engagement unit, our CBVI relations unit is getting tacked on as well as 55+ initiatives as well as, I think two other units with similar focuses. This will give us the opportunity to actually be more collaborative to identify business partners that other workforce partners are working with as well as eventually be able to provide referrals if a business identifies a need that's outside the scope of what our unit does but can be best served by another unit. That delay definitely had its benefits.

And then finally assistive technology is huge. Every single event that we do, our businesses want a demo. They want to know about accessibility. They want to see the in action, the ways that our consumers access print, access the computer, interact with the world. Better resources are limited. What we're doing right now is we're kind of saving our requests to our technology specialists and are able to or hoping to be able to address the assistive technology request on our own by training my business relations specialists a little bit more deeply in assistive technology so they feel comfortable doing a basic demo.

Where are we today? Um, we are continuing to focus on engaging business through education. We're working on finding what works for us. So because we did bring on additional people and are one business relations specialist was out for about nine months, our unit is coming back together and taking time to look back at what have we been doing for the past 18 months? Is it working? Are the performance metrics still applicable? What are the presentations that we're looking at? So really getting back to basics, bringing everybody to the same page and making sure we're consistent in our messaging and the presentation and services that we're providing.

Obviously we continue to increase our business and partner relationships. We're working on finalizing the marketing, sales force, policy procedures, and continuing to cultivate relationships with our workforce partners.

I can't speak enough about the benefit and value of being a part of the JD TAP learning community. It was a blessing to not have to recreate the wheel, to be able to say to, uh, Russ or Linda or Neil, can you give me examples of policy? Can you give me examples of job descriptions? Of communication policies and within a couple of days have a whole bunch of examples in my inbox that we can look at and really process and find what was going to be the best match for our agency.

Getting inspiration from others at the various gathering and conferences, seeing what everybody else was doing as they were developing, seeing what everybody who's been doing this for so long like Alabama and hearing the growth of business engagement over the last couple of decades, was really invaluable to me to think back to, okay, why are we doing this? What's our motivation? What's our philosophy around business engagement? Obviously New Jersey wasn't just going to list what Delaware was doing or what Pennsylvania was doing because we have different needs and challenges and just a different make up of our state.

But being able to look at all the different models, seeing that similar philosophy that tied everything together really helped ground me and my unit.

And then the check ins and support from the TA team, held us accountable. So that was really nice because they kind of refocused us every month or so when we had our call, okay, where are we? Okay, we have to get back to this if we put it on the bag burner. That was just really a big part of it.

And then the bigger thing. And this isn't something that can be quantified is not feeling isolated throughout this whole process. Knowing that we're part of a larger VR family or larger network. It's a little hokey, but being able to, I see Ralph commenting up here. Being able to hear what Pennsylvania has been doing and connect with them to get resources from them was great. Being able to reach out to Connecticut who is also part of the learning collaborative. And be like, hey, I heard you guys have been doing this. How is that working for you? Was really just huge knowing that we had other people going through the same thing and being able to learn from each other.

And then also get business referrals. We definitely got referrals from Pennsylvania, from Connecticut of companies that wanted to crossover the border. And it speaks highly to the work that our neighbor states have been doing. As well as our relationship that they feel confident to share their business contacts with us and help us develop the same relationships. So I would strongly recommend and/or jump at the chance to be a part of another learning collaborative like this if I was developing a new opportunity.

So what's next? Next is just kind of more of the same, recognizing that we're going to continue to learn and grow, to continue to reevaluate where we are and is what we're doing working. That's really the moral of the story because-- as we get out there, as we provide more of services, as we services and get more business partners, we're going to have to continuously shift and determine whether or not we're working as oppose to keeping everything static.

I talked about the desire to expand our unit to include assistive technology person. Our TCI training program as well as continue to improve our partnerships. So that is all I have. So, I think it's time for questions, right?

>> Right. It's time for questions. Thank you very much, Amanda. Great job. We do have one question from James Howard.

When completing Labor Market Information for the project and doing the training with LMI, was that national LMI or regional or both?

>> Um, it was largely focused on regional LMI. With regards to our being able to target in New Jersey where opportunities were or what the hiring trends were, requirements, things like that. We did, uh, we did look at some national tools as well because if somebody said they wanted to work in forestry, I could be wrong, but I don't think New Jersey has a huge forestry industry. And if that really is a goal, individual wants to explore we want to have that conversation that's about choice, right? Okay, New Jersey doesn't have or isn't hiring a lot in this particular field. If this is what you want to pursue, let's take a look at where this industry or this particular type of job is hiring. Are you okay to relocate? While our focus was on the local and regional, we did provide national as well.

>> Okay. I see Sharon is typing. I have a question while we're waiting for others. I encourage people to type questions in the questions and comments box. I have a question, Amanda. Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between your employment specialist and your voc rehab counselor. What kind of communication systems did you guys set up to make there was the kind of collaboration needed for success.

>> Absolutely. So this is another example of us borrowing what other states have been doing. So we did implement kind of like the weekly huddle model where for a quick 15 minutes, our business relations specialists are getting together with our VR counselors, giving them an update on what's been going on what work they've been doing and giving the counselors an opportunity to share what they have coming down the pipe, who they have that's job seeking right now and talk about any of the larger initiatives that we were putting on. Our counselor, our business relations specialists are also in the office as well. So they are meeting with our counselors on a one-to-one basis if there is an individualized need. If somebody needs additional support with the talent acquisition portal or whatever it may be. So there's a mix of kind of a formal or at least a regularly scheduled meeting as well as an as needed meeting. And then obviously via email communication. But we all know that we get a million emails a day. So it's really easy for kind of those things to fall by the wayside. Making sure that they're touching base in person. And then our business relations specialists are always included in any of our VR meetings whether it's an office meeting or a statewide training.

>> Great. We do have another question from Karen. What case-- assistive do you use? And did you mention being able to track outcomes in your case management system? we are currently using-- system 7. We are going to be migrating to alliances aware system within the next couple of years. So we are not being able to track anything in system 7 right now because obviously there are no major enhancements going on within that.

I think when I mentioned outcome tracking in the case management system, that was in relation to the Labor Market Information section. And so we are hoping to be able to somehow record that when we do any sort of like enhancements or tweaking of the aware system when it comes to us. To be able to see what tools counselors are using in regard to the comprehensive assessment, informed choice process. But that's down the road.

>> Okay. All right. I have another question while we're waiting for some of the audience to ask questions.

You talked about, would go with the general agency in New Jersey. And for those states where there is a separate, where the agencies are separate, we have a generally VR agency and the blind agency, what are the advantages in your mind of working collaboratively with the general agency which is usually a lot larger? Can you talk more about that?

>> Absolutely. Um, so I think one of the biggest advantages is that we, we are the ones with the knowledge about blindness, about vision impairment. About the accessibility and assistive technology. And so us bringing that knowledge to the table for them, means that they're not speaking about things that they might not be comfortable speaking with and vice versa. While we do work with individuals with additional disabilities, their experience in the areas of mental health and intellectual and developmental disabilities, autism, et cetera, is deeper than ours because those are the individuals that they're working with on a daily basis.

So just being able to come together and share our knowledge and resources and being able to make those connections when a business wants a more broad stroke disability awareness presentation, that covers all the individuals we both service. Similarly working with an agency, it expands our bandwith. So we're able to reach out and connect with more businesses than just my four and their seven people. We now have 11. So we're able to make more connections in that respect. And then I think the last one is recognizing that our talent pool that CBVI has is smaller than the talent pool that DVRS has. So our general agency has much larger amount of consumers seeking services, who are job seeking. So for us to be able to be a source of qualified talent for a business is much more difficult because based on the day, we may not have anybody that we can connect with a business who is looking to fill a position. Whereas if we have a good relationship with our general agency, we can share that job with them. They can see if they have anybody that could be a good fit. And end of the day, the bowl is to serve the business and meet the business needs. If we can do that by providing a referral to our workforce partners, particularly our general agency, that's a mark in the win column for us.

>> Great. Great. I hate to be asking all the questions. But I have one more from my end. We have a couple of minutes left. And probably take one more question after this question that I'm going to pose.

The question has to do with support from senior management when you're undertaking such a project. Do those blind agencies out there that are thinking about building a business engagement system like you guys have done in New Jersey, talk about how important it is for the senior management to be onboard and be supportive. Talk about how your senior management was supportive.

>> Oh, my gosh. Um, I feel like I'm the luckiest girl in the world sometimes because I do have amazing support from my boss who's chief of program administration and our director Dan Frye who encouraged me and my unit and overall to really be creative, to try new things, to risk failing, honestly. To really give me the support and whatever I need to get this off the ground.

I mean, allowing us to be a part of the learning collaborative to go to, I think almost every single one of the national gathering. I think the only one I didn't go to was the one in Albuquerque. And learn from everybody across the country within the VR system. I couldn't have done it without their support. Gosh. It's really invaluable because I know that, when I'm working on this project and I'm trying to get the unit off the ground and implement new initiatives and new policies, that I have their back to them pushed this down the line to the counselors, to my staff. And to say, listen, this is something the agency is 100% behind. It helps the initiative didn't only come from the top but it also came from the strategic plan and the request of our consumers of our counselors of the community who really did identify business engagement as a need.

>> Great. I'm tell you as a member of the technical assistance team, it was great to be a witness to your support. And very critical. We have time for one final question. And it comes from Karen. She's asking a question about the reverse job fair.

What was that with job seekers? She's not familiar with the concept. Maybe you could explain what a reverse job fair is.

>> Absolutely. We again borrowed the concept from, oh, my gosh. Is that Iowa? I think it was Iowa. So basically we flipped the script. Instead of the businesses sitting at tables and having their information and terms and all of that, we had about 12 consumers participate. We did a couple of days of prep. We did a workshop on soft skills, on resumé development, on interview skills, on your elevator pick. We had a presentation boards with their credentials and resumé and what they were looking for. Instead of the consumers going around from business to business to business, they were stationery. And they were at their table and they were able to have their presentation materials that represented them and positions they were looking for. And the businesses came in and they went from table to table and really -- and they had the opportunity to talk to each one of the consumers to see what they had to say, get a copy of their resumé. It was hey really -- it is a really great concept. It was a really good day. We are putting the plugs on it just for us until we have more partners that we can do a more targeted match so that we can make sure, if we have people, oh, it is from Iowa. Thanks, Joel.

So, um, that we can say, okay, we have ten consumers who are interested in retail and customer service. And we can bring in 15 businesses that are going to be hired in retail and customer service. Our businesses and our consumers when we did our last one were over the board. I think that's why we didn't have successful outcomes from it. But it is a concept that we want to revisit once our unit has more consumers that we know that are job seeking and are ready for that type of event and more businesses that we can have and do more targeted events.

>> Okay. Thank you. Well, we're just about at time limit. And I guess I will turn it over to Katie.

>> Thanks, Neil. And thank you, Amanda. I'm just going to go really quickly to the final slide which is the contact information for Amanda as well as JD steam. Thank you for joining, I'll take you now to the evaluation screen. You'll see a link here where you can follow this link and take this survey to tell us how the webinar was today. If you are a CRC looking for credits, we would like everyone to take the survey. It helps us improve our webinars and get feedback. So thank you for joining. And check out Explore VR. We have another upcoming WCF. Developing career pathways which is from the Delaware VR. That's coming up in November. So thank you again. Thank you Amanda and Neil. And have a great day.

>> Thank you, Katie.

>> Thank you. Thanks, Amanda.

>> Thanks, Neil.

>> Bye-bye.