Job-Driven Technical Assistance Center (JD-VRTAC): New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Engaging Businesses from a Blindness Perspective: New Jersey’s Development of a Business Relations Unit

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Webinar Objectives

• Explain JD-VRTAC goals, partners, TA, and Learning Collaborative
• Describe New Jersey CBVI background/services
• Explain New Jersey CBVI JD-VRTAC project background
• Discuss New Jersey CBVI JD-VRTAC project purpose & goals
• Describe New Jersey CBVI JD-VRTAC project implementation
• Share New Jersey CBVI JD-VRTAC project accomplishments
• Share challenges & lessons learned from New Jersey CBVI JD-VRTAC project
• Describe current status of New Jersey CBVI JD-VRTAC project
• Discuss what was most helpful from the TA and Learning Collaborative throughout this process
• Share New Jersey CBVI next steps, future direction, & goals
JD-VRTAC Goals

Improve skills of state VR agency staff, other rehab professionals & providers of VR services, who are trained to provide “job-driven” VR services & supports to PWD, employers & customized training providers.

Four Topic Areas:

1. Business Engagement
2. Employer Supports
3. Labor Market Information (LMI)
4. Customized Training Providers

www.explorevr.org
JD-VRTAC Partners

Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI), Univ. of Massachusetts/Boston

*In Partnership with:*

- Jobs for the Future (JFF)
- Univ. of Arkansas/CURRENTS
  - Univ. of Washington
- Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR)
  - United States Business Leadership Network (USBLN)
  - Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)

*In Collaboration with:*

- National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB)
  - Technical Assistance Center Collaborative
The JD-VRTAC provides 3 types of TA:

- **Intensive**: 11 VR agencies participated in Cohort 1 of the center’s Intensive TA and 9 agencies are participating in Cohort 2 of the center’s Intensive TA. Agencies receiving Intensive TA become members of a Learning Collaborative to share strategies and solutions.

- **Targeted**: Several agencies have requested targeted TA related to one of the four job-driven topical areas. Additionally, the Center is hosting communities of practice and forums on relevant issues.

- **Universal**: The Center hosts and archives webinars on topics related to the four job-driven topical areas and presents project information at CSAVR and NCSAB.
JD-VRTAC Learning Collaborative

• As part of receiving intensive TA, 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 cohort to discuss job-driven topics
• 18 state VR agencies are part of the JD-VRTAC Learning Collaborative
NJ CBVI Background and Services

- CBVI is in Department of Human Services providing services to individuals who are blind, vision-impaired, and deaf-blind
- Lifespan services – Infant, Education, Transition, VR, Independent Living/Older Blind
- Services largely provided in-house, other than AT Training for adults, and employment services (job development, placement, SE)
- 3 Service Centers (Newark, Freehold, and Cherry Hill), Satellite Office in Atlantic City, and Joseph Kohn Training Center in New Brunswick
NJ CBVI JD-VRTAC Project
Background

• 2007/2008 – Previous attempts at developing a BRU fizzled due to mission drift and resource allocation

• 2013-2015 – CBVI Strategic Plan – Development of BRU listed as one of the major strategic initiatives

• 2014 – Passing of WIOA; Business Engagement Mandate

• 2015 –Applied for JD-VRTAC Intensive TA
JD-VRTAC Project Purpose and Goals I

Year 1:

- Establish a Business Relations Unit (BRU)
  - Goals: Coordinate efforts, improve marketing, operationalize unit, measure efforts, increase employment outcomes
  - No unit existed at this point
- Incorporate LMI on operational level
  - Provide LMI training to staff, evaluate training
JD-VRTAC Project Purpose and Goals II

Year 2:

• Solidify Business Relations Unit (BRU)
  – Implement marketing plan, finalize internal policies/procedures, launch SalesForce, conduct BRU activities and events

• Expand training on LMI
  – TCI+
Labor Market Information Training

• May 2016
  – Pre-Assessment based off survey PA created
  – LMI Training for VRCs – NJ DOL, ICI, and CBVI

• Follow-up Training in March & May 2017 (and every chance I could build it in)

• June 2017 – Business Engagement Training by Mississippi State include LMI component
JD-VRTAC Project Implementation II

Labor Market Information Impact
• Issued the same assessment one year later
• Some staff turnover and new counselors brought on board since pre-assessment
• # of Respondents – 2016 = 23; 2017 = 28
• Overall, saw an increase in VRC’s self-report of understanding and use of LMI from 2016 to 2017; expanded knowledge, purpose, and type of resources used
• December 2017 - Planned implementation of TCI+
JD-VRTAC Project Implementation III

Business Relations Unit Development & Staffing

• May/June 2016 - First two BRS staff hired
  – Job description & performance measures
  – Started outreach to business utilizing resources from JD-VRTAC
  – Identified education-first as a unit priority

• January 2017
  – One staff added, one out on leave
  – Recognized need for BRU Supervisor

• September 2017
  – Fully staffed at 3 BRS and 1 BRU Supervisor

• Assistive Technology Specialist wanted…
Unit’s Outreach Efforts

• July & August 2016 – TAP Training
• October 2016 – NDEAM – consumer-focused events with business partners in each office
• December 2016 – Southern Schedule A with DVRS
• 2017 – Monthly accessibility event w/Princeton University
• May 2017 – 1st Business Summit
• June 2017 – 1st Reverse Job Fair, Northern Schedule A Hiring Event with DVRS
• October 2017 - First NDEAM as a full unit  
  – 3 DMD, collaborative Business Summit with NJ DVRS, Shop Rite Job-Shadow Day, & other awareness events
JD-VRTAC Project Accomplishments

• Fully staffed as of August 2017
  – 3 Business Relations Specialists, 1 Supervisor
• LMI – VRC’s reported increase in frequency, type, and attitudes toward use with consumers
• Career Exploration Center launched
• Marketing materials and SalesForce in process
Challenges and Lessons Learned

• Recruitment and staffing for unit
• Other agency changes and initiatives led to limited resources for project implementation
• Communication/Collaboration – internal & external
• Keeping focus on business-oriented education and services; not job placement specialists
• Tracking of Data – SalesForce process started in Spring of 2016; just now being customized for our unit, with implementation targeted for January 2018.
  – BUT! Collaborating with larger Department of Labor and Workforce Development for a shared app
• Assistive Technology is HUGE – but resources are limited
JD-VRTAC Project Today (current status)

EVOLVING

• Focusing on engaging business through education
• Working on finding what works for us – back to basics
• Honing staff skills and resources
• Increasing business and partner relationships
• Finalizing marketing, SalesForce, policy/procedures
• Cultivating solid relationship with DVRS Business Engagement and other workforce partners
What was most helpful about receiving TA?

- Not “re-creating the wheel”
- Inspiration from others
- Mini-Conferences
- Check-ins and support from TA Team and LC
Next Steps, Future Directions, and Goals

- “Finalize” on-going goals
- Expand unit to include dedicated Assistive Technology staff person
- Implement TCI+ training
- Continue to improve partnerships
Questions?
JD-VRTAC
Contact Information

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