

## YOUTH-FOCUSED INITIATIVES

Five state agency practitioners presented a panel about **Youth-Focused Initiatives**. This panel presentation was followed by small and large group discussions, and report-outs about emerging practices and recommendations to the field.

### Emerging Practices

- » **Partner with consumer organizations.** South Carolina Blind is contracting with two Independent Living Centers and the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of South Carolina to provide Pre-ETS (Pre-Employment Transition Services), including self-advocacy, work readiness, college tours, career exploration, and work-based learning. Nebraska Blind contracted with NFB to provide career mentoring.
- » **Partner with general VR agency to provide Pre-ETS services.** There are only 525 students in Kentucky who are blind/visually impaired (BVI), so Kentucky Blind partnered with the general VR agency to spend the required services.
- » **Use interns/practicum students to provide services.** University of Kentucky students provide work experiences to Pre-ETS students and receive internship/practicum credit.
- » **Train Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) on working with BVI students.** Pennsylvania Combined includes this training in their CRP contracts.
- » **Provide social skills training as part of Pre-ETS.** Nebraska Blind, Kentucky Blind, and Idaho Blind all provide specific training on basic social skills.
- » **Use certified teachers to provide Pre-ETS.** Missouri VR contracts with the University of Missouri to provide Pre-ETS; they hire certified teachers to provide services after school and during the summer. Alaska VR has a similar program. Pennsylvania VR pays for teachers to participate in their summer programs for BVI youth.
- » **Educate Workforce Development Boards and One-Stops about the capabilities and needs of BVI students.** Michigan Blind uses One-Stop business connections to do mock interviews and coaching.
- » **Offer a Deaf-Blind expanded core curriculum week.** Kentucky VR collaborated with the University of Kentucky to host a summer program for Deaf-Blind youth. Students who graduate from the program become peer mentors to new students.

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

- » **Connect with other WIOA partners** to access resources for summer work programs, internships, etc. developed for all job seekers.
- » **Market summer opportunities as early as possible.** Students and families need time to complete paperwork and work around other summer activities like vacations.
- » **Collaborate with schools, universities, and other partners.** At the same time, it's important to clarify VR and school system roles.
- » **Advocate for Teachers for the Visually Impaired to be trained in employment and WIOA issues.**
- » Shift the focus from college degree programs to **include technical training** as well.
- » Use progressive employment approaches like **informational interviews and job shadowing** to show employers what BVI students can do.
- » **Require students to interview** for summer jobs/internships, even if the job has been set aside for them.
- » **Use BVI professionals as instructors/mentors.** Connect students with people who are employed in their fields of interest.
- » Avoid doing things for students that they could **learn to do for themselves.**
- » Offer **emotional skills and financial literacy training** as part of Pre-ETS.
- » Give opportunities for students to **meet peers from other communities.** Sometimes they are the only BVI student in their local community and school.

### Panelists

#### REBECCA BATES

South Carolina Blind: summer teen programs and student internships

#### CAROL JENKINS

Nebraska Blind: initiatives for students and youth with disabilities

#### SHIRLEY ROBINSON

Georgia VR Agency: partnership with consumer groups to provide transition services

#### CORA MCNABB

Kentucky Office for the Blind: collaborative efforts in summer work programs, STEM camps, post-secondary education programs

#### JOE STRECHAY

Pennsylvania OVR: , summer programs, STEM events, and partnerships

## Funder information

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## Author information

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**Institute for  
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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.

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