

Attachment 2



U.S. Department of Labor
Veterans' Employment and Training Service

and

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service

**Pilot Site Technical Assistance Visits
Interim Report**

**"A Team Approach for Providing Exceptional Service to
Disabled Veterans"**



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Demonstration Project

The purpose of the demonstration project was to identify best practices, develop common performance elements, recording and reporting processes, identify administrative barriers and methods to remove them, and provide technical assistance and training to VR&E, VETS and State staff on how to implement appropriate employment processes and improve working partnerships. Eight locations were selected to test the proposed process improvements. The project began in January, 2008 and continued through implementation of the joint initiative nationwide in October, 2008.

Site Visit

The Joint Workgroup (JWG) members conducted technical assistance visits to all pilot sites during the month of March through May, 2008. The visits were conducted in order to determine how each site is progressing, address any barriers or issues, gather best practices and discover any policies or procedures that have been put into place for the benefit of the veteran. JWG members also made recommendations in order to improve customer service to Chapter 31 veterans. Please note the information provided below is only a summary of the visits. For more information as to the progress and/or barriers identified and how pilot sites resolved barriers, please refer to the Technical Assistance Guide contact information listed for each pilot site.

Denver, Colorado Pilot Site

The VR&E and the Colorado Department of Labor & Employment established an MOU on March 30, 2007. The MOU covers basic roles and responsibilities of each partnering agency. Each year the partners review the MOU to determine revisions needed to make the relationship stronger between the State Workforce Agency, (SWA), DVET and VR&E. The Denver pilot site had set in motion several years ago the co-location of a DVOP at the VA Regional Office. This partnership has worked well for the benefit of the Chapter 21 veterans and was the impetus for this demonstration pilot project.

The referral process begins with VR&E case managers referring job ready veterans to the Intensive Service Coordinator (ISC). The Employment Counselor (EC) is not involved in the referral process. The EC's role in the referral process is more global with employer interaction. Once the ISC receives a referral from a case manager, it is the responsibility of the ISC to enter data onto the data collection spreadsheet. He then scans the referral form and sends via e-mail to the appropriate DVOP in the workforce center near the location of the clients' residence. The ISC monitors and tracks progress of clients on a monthly basis. If no services have been provided within 30 days, ISC contacts the DVOP or LVER to determine why services have not been provided or job placement has not occurred. The ISC and EC meet every Tuesday to discuss the status of clients and any issues that need to be resolved. ISC participates in all employment VR&E meetings. A concern was expressed regarding the referral which contains privacy information is sent without security measures. This practice will be discussed further to ensure the ISC has e-mail capabilities with security measures to ensure privacy.

The SWA and ISC offer job seeking skills workshops at two different locations, one in Denver and the other in Colorado Springs. The Chapter 31 veterans are required to attend a job seeking skills workshop before they can receive their Employee Adjustment Allowance (EAA). The VR&E office also has a Job Resource Center which provides job searching skills training to all veterans including Chapter 31 participants.

The EC and ISC conduct employer outreach together and recently developed an employment placement program with Coors Brewing Co.

The ISC follows up with the SWA to ensure accountability with VR&E referrals. However, there is no written monthly feedback report sent back to VR&E to ensure progress. JWG gave a sample of a monthly feedback report that Oakland is presently using. Partners will look into developing a report to reflect current attainable data.

SWA is working on allowing VR&E case managers and the EC access to the State quarterly reporting system which will allow partners to review progress notes entered into the system by DVOP and LVER staff about the veterans they are assisting in obtaining employment.

VR&E Officer and SWA agree to register Chapter 31 veterans into the one-stop system when veteran is job ready. Early registration will distort SWA quarterly performance standards.

The ISC is doing an outstanding job collecting data and entering it into the spreadsheet. ISC tweaked the spreadsheet to include other areas the SWA needs to collect.

Recommendations/Follow-Up

Because the MOU covered basis information, the site visit team recommended CDLE, DVET and VR&E update their MOU to include expanded roles and responsibilities as prescribed in the Technical Assistance Guide (TAG). The partners also agreed to review the MOU listed in the TAG to determine other areas that would be appropriate to include in their MOU.

Follow-up: As of July 9, 2007, the partners have entered into a new MOU agreement and have submitted a modification to its Jobs for Veteran Grant Modification for additional funds to fund the ISC position.

Partners need to discuss the issue of security when e-mailing referral information to DVOP and LVER staff. The partners need ensure the ISC has e-mail capabilities with security measures to ensure privacy. This process will further enhance quality services for all Chapter 31 participants.

Additional security issue was raised regarding Social Security account numbers (SSANs) being listed on referral forms. The SWA suggested to VR&E to mask SSANs by scrambling the numbers into letters prior to referring, which is how the State protects this personal identifying information when referring to other staff members or agencies. It was recommended VR&E mask SSANs.

VR&E needs to explore the ability for ISC staff to have read-only access to C-WINRS. VR&E Officer will follow-up with this issue.

The visit was successful with both parties agreeing to expand their current MOU, and to work together to insure a successful outcome with Denver's demonstration site requirements.

Little Rock, Arkansas Pilot Site

Little progress has been made in implementing the model demonstration project. No referrals were being made to DVOP or LVER staff and very little communication was occurring. JWG members met with both agencies prior to joint meeting with partners. We learned that there was lack of cooperation between VR&E and the SWA before and after they were informed of their participation in the demonstration project. We identified many issues on both sides, which assisted us in working at resolving some of the issues and getting the agencies to begin working together.

Our combined agency meeting was challenging, but we were able to set the tone for cooperation and established a dialog. Initially, both agencies had not fully agreed with participating in the demonstration project but eventually they acknowledged their acceptance and contribution to the project. Each agency agreed and understood that their opinions and needs would be communicated and discussed by all partners.

An agreement was made to have a SWA staff co-located with the VR&E Regional Office four hours per day, starting at 12:00 noon to 4:00 pm, Monday through Thursday. Also, both partners agreed that their current MOU needs to be revisited to address the needs of the Demonstration Project, and to address the need for an ISC stationed at the VR&E RO. It was recommended that roles and responsibilities be clearly outlined in the new MOU.

Little Rock Follow-Up Visit:

Cooperation between both agencies is progressing. The following are concerns and actions:

- The assigned ISC is having difficulty with office space requirements, however, the Regional Office (RO) Director is in the process of procuring office space for the ISC;
- Configuration of the RO computers to allow veterans to be able to save resumes, job lists, and labor market information on a flash drive, CD, DVD (due to Privacy Act Information participants cannot leave the building with resumes, etc.);
- Currently, the RO Information Security Officer (ISO) is not willing to address computer needs and security issues of the ISC until directed to do so by a higher authority and requests he be informed in writing to address these issues;
- SWA requested bringing a lap top computer to the job lab to utilize Internet access. This will allow the ISC to access Arkansas Job Link system (AJL) without using VBA systems. Presently, ISO will not allow this happen;
- Once the ISC is authorized to use a SWA lap top, he will then have access to the Arkansas Job Link system (AJL);
- Issue of the ISC being able to access the read only CWINRS data.

The temporarily assigned part-time ISC is also the State Veterans Coordinator, which has created an issue for the SWA. The SWA will be requesting funding from DOL/VETS to staff a full time ISC at the RO.

Recommendations by JWG:

Schedule follow-up technical assistance conference call to discuss progress with the following items:

- VR&E Action: Evaluate procedure for changing the current configuration of the JRL computers to allow veterans to actually save resumes, job lists, and labor market information to removable media such as flash drives, CD, DVD.
- JWG Action: Seek clarification of the DVOP (ISC) being able to access (read only) CWINRS information and to feed demographic and personal data into the state data systems from a VA location.
- JWG Action: Allow DVOP (ISC) to use lap-top PC on the Internet connection in the JRL or other VA location.

Manchester, New Hampshire Pilot Site

Presently, New Hampshire has a working MOU and all parties agree that the MOU is working nicely. VR&E & SWA staff are working together to define the role of the ISC. However, the SWA has not designated an ISC formally. VR&E & SWA staff wants to define the role of the ISC in a manner that reflects the uniqueness of their particular locale, for example a very small station that doesn't warrant a full-time co-located ISC. The VR&E division has designated space and can/will provide necessary support.

The referral process is currently being developed based on the referral process outlined in the TAG. Referrals are being made and participants have been receiving job development and placement services by ISC. The JWG team was impressed with the relationships that have been established between VR&E and SWA agencies. All working partners appear committed to finalize discussions and implement formal referral mechanism in the near future. Copies of the documents were provided to the JWG by the local Manchester VR&E/SWA Team. The existing partnership can best be described as a work in progress. The partnership between SWA and VR&E in Manchester has improved over time. The team is working toward full implementation of MOU guidelines. The SWA supervisor, VR&E Officer, and EC are meeting as necessary to refine the process and are very close to full implementation of demonstration project guidelines.

The ISC/DVET/VR&E Officer meets on a regular basis to discuss co-enrolled participants. Currently, the EC is designated to complete a monthly Workload History Spreadsheet for the Demonstration Project. All team members acknowledged the importance of comparing and reconciliation of data between the agencies. The lines of communication are open and information exchange is taking place at this time; however, the JWG Team has noticed that there was tension and resistance in terms of establishing roles and responsibilities as described by the TAG.

The EC presently enters the data on the spreadsheet and seems to have a good understanding of completing the sheet on a monthly basis. However, once roles and responsibilities are defined, this task needs to be completed by the ISC.

Recommendations/Concerns:

Consideration should be given to providing technical training for both VR&E and SWA staff for better understanding of individual agencies work process as well as improving the communication lines. Recommended training site may be at the NVTI, Denver, CO.

Because there was concern about two areas related to common terminology:

- VR&E using DOT codes while SWA uses O'NET codes.

- Suitable Employment - SWA does not differentiate between employment and suitable employment. Although they certainly understand the concept, they have no mechanism to distinguish the two.

It was recommended that a detailed process be provided, similar to a flow chart. DVOP expressed a desire for improved coordination, resolution of common terminology issues (definition of Suitable Employment primary concern).

SWA supervisor is in favor of early intervention, but expressed concern regarding the 9002 and VETS 200 reports which require the registration of a veteran to be closed after a 90 day period without service provision, which negatively impacts performance measures. This is a common theme between numerous SWA across the country.

The inclusion and exchange of SSN was an issue for all partners present. The consensus was they were going to limit the exchange to last 4 digits of the social security number.

The partners are "vetting" a locally developed privacy act instrument with local Regional Counsel. Various privacy instruments were reviewed (4142, 5345)—Related documents were provided to the JWG Advisory Team.

Montgomery, Alabama Pilot Site

An MOU is in place and signed by both agencies. The partners are in the process of revising the MOU to reflect the new changes in support of the demonstration site project procedures. Communication between the VR&E and the SWA is very positive and constructive. Their updated MOU will not only focus on the demonstration site issues as outlined in the TAG, but will also focus on a positive customer support program that will enhance participants employment processes. The new MOU will also set guidelines for resource management, and will help the process become less cumbersome to the participant. Less paperwork is also a key focus that will assist in this effort.

The updated MOU will also reflect a major breakthrough with VR&E and DVET/SWA partnership. Assignment of the ISC's to the Northern and Southern Alabama areas will be the responsibility of two SWA Directors (Northern and Southern Regional Directors). This process will ensure accountability at not only the ISC level, but also throughout the field DVOP/LVER to ensure performance standards at all levels.

The Alabama Department of Labor is headed by the Department of Field Operations. Field Operations is responsible for the management and accountability of all SWA employees. The updated MOU will address this process and a flowchart will be provided to show the flow of the referral process from VR&E to the SWA and back again.

Please note, the LVER named position will be eliminated in SWA. The new acronym will be the ISC's assigned to the VR&E division, and the DVOPs that are assigned to the local SWA career one stop centers. This new change will be reflected in the updated MOU. The projected signature date for the updated MOU is late spring, 2008. Partners will forward a signed copy of their updated MOU for JWG review.

It is recommended that once the ISC's are assigned to northern Birmingham VR&E office and southern Montgomery Office, a complete review of their progress will be needed by the JWG to ensure compliance with the demonstration site procedures. The assigned ISC's will have adequate office space to meet demonstration project goals.

VR&E Montgomery co-registers all Chapter 31 participants with the SWA. This process is a positive step toward establishing a counseling relationship with the veteran, VR&E, and SWA. In addition to co-registration, SWA gets credit for assisting VR&E participants prior to job placement which is reflected in their performance standards. When questioning the SWA Director about the burden to SWA with the DOL 90 day reporting system, he informs us that he able to tweak the system so participants are not automatically exited after 90 days. SWA manages the numbers to reflect actual case management of Chapter 31 participants and when Chapter 31 participants become "Job Ready", they are formally referred in writing by the counselor to the ISC via the EC. Once the ISC

receives the formal referral, he forwards the referral to the local employment service manger, who then assigns the referral to the local DVOP/LVER for action.

VR&E Officer/Supervisors and all team members meet with assigned ISC/SWA at least monthly to discuss the progress and any issues with veterans placed in job ready status. Many issues are discussed during monthly meetings which include veteran job search progress, on-the-job training development, non-paid work experience, selective job placement issues, follow-up services, provisions of job seeking skills training, job analysis, problems with veteran participation, and labor market information.

The data collection spreadsheet is an appropriate means of collecting data. Please note the Northern and Southern ISC's are not yet assigned as of March, and current data collection is the responsibility of the entire team. There are no problems associated with the data spreadsheet reporting. Montgomery is adapting to meet the requirements and need of the demonstration project.

The use of common terminology in the TAG is sufficient guidance for both agencies. There seems to be no problem with understanding the listed common terminologies.

It is noted that the referral form listed in the demonstration project TAG is modeled after the Montgomery model. The referral process and tracking is outstanding. SWA completes a monthly progress report back to VR&E.

Note: The SWAs have their own performance standards which are based on Common Measures. The updated MOU will address performance measures in detail to reflect the requirements in the demonstration site TAG.

No recommendations were made at this time.

Oakland, California Pilot Site

Oakland's current MOU is complete and all partners have signed. Parties agreed to include all the Department of Veterans Affairs Regional Offices (LA, Oakland, and San Diego) all VA Medical Centers, the State of California Employment and Development Department, and the Department of Labor (DOL), Veterans Employment and Training Service (DOL/VETS). The MOU outlines all relationships and responsibilities at the State and local levels to include orientation and staff training development. DOL-VETS, DVA and State of California Employment Development Department (EDD) officials within the California informs each other of staff training or development workshops, conferences, and programs, and afford each other the opportunity to participate in or attend each others training sessions. The departments participating in this agreement exchange relevant information derived from interviews, counseling, testing or other required information with the respect to client services. The exchange of information is in accordance with applicable State and Federal laws, agency regulations and policies, and is accompanied by written consent of individual veterans, as appropriate.

DVA, DOL-VETS and EDD personnel will coordinate services to veterans and their dependents. Special emphasis will be placed on programs authorized under Title 38 U.S.C., including the readjustment counseling carried out under Section 3687, and the rehabilitation and training activities carried out under Chapter 31.

During our meeting, the state director discussed concerns with the Chapter 31 program in regard to communication between VR&E and the SWA's. In the past, SWA was not getting information back from VR&E on the veteran's current status. SWA director agreed that the new MOU should rectify this problem. Currently, a copy of the veteran's Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP) and Individual Employment Adjustment Plan (IEAP) is forwarded to the SWA with letters of referral and other pertinent information. A monthly progress reporting system has been established, generated by SWA. VR&E ensure accountability within the process. California SWA expressed concerns with the early intervention process outlined in the TAG. California will not register veterans during the early intervention period due to the VETS quarterly reporting system. Therefore, participants must be job ready before registration.

California SWA performance standards are based on a 90 day service process. Performance standards are in place to hold the SWA directors accountable for production numbers. It was recommended by the SWA Director to assign an Employment Measurable Component to the IWRP as a goal for the participant in order help ensure veterans participation in the one-stop system.

The Oakland team has developed a monthly veteran progress report that is very impressive. JWG will need to evaluate this form for possible sharing with other demonstration sites.

SWA agrees that when VR&E Counselors send out motivational letters to veterans, VR&E should include a copy to SWA ISC.

SWA California is still using dial-up services that may slow down production.

Recommendation:

Provide Copy of MOU with JWG members for the sharing with the other pilot sites.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Pilot Site

The MOU is in place and was updated in April 2006. The local SWA and VR&E Team have been working slowly but steadily. By participating in the demonstration project, the local work team is working more closely together.

ISC is co-located, assigned full time in the VR&E Division. VR&E & SWA began to work together to identify the role of the ISC within the VR&E for the purpose of improving employment process.

ISC is assigned suitable office space/computer connectivity/phone/ and other support services deemed necessary to perform his job as well as implementation of this demonstration project. ISC also has "CWINRS" Ready Only Access. Referral process is established but due to the lack of communication, between the two agencies, the system has not been working smoothly. Some referrals have been made and veterans have been receiving employment services by ISC/DVOP. The advisory JWG Team observed that the VR&E/SWA working relationship has been re-established with open lines of communication. All working partners appear to be motivated and committed to implement and reinforce a working system to accomplish the agencies' goal as well as successfully completing the demonstration project.

The existing partnership can best be described as a "work in progress." We have learned that the partnership between SWA and VR&E in Philadelphia has improved since the latter part of 2007 with the support of the DOL/VA Joint Work Groups as well as the involvement of the local DOL/VA Administrators. The team is working toward full implementation of MOU guidelines. The SWA supervisor, ISC, VR&E Officer, Assistant VR&EO and EC are meeting regularly to refine the working partnerships to have better understanding and toward a full implementation of demonstration project guidelines.

ISC/DVET/VR&E Officer meets on a regular basis. They discuss and plan to meet more frequently, at the minimum of monthly to follow up referrals and to monitor active cases.

All team members were present acknowledged the importance of comparing data and reconciling the data between the agencies. The lines of communication began to open and information exchange began to take place at this time; however, the JWG Team has noticed that there was tension and resistance while establishing roles and responsibilities as described by the TAG.

ISC and EC will be working together to complete the monthly data and will submit it to the VR&EO and the State Veterans Coordinator.

SWA supervisor is in favor and encouraging the early registration. He is not concerned about the 9002 and VETS 200 report requiring a participant to be a negative exit after a 90 day period without services provided, which is a common

theme among numerous SWAs across the country. The SWA supervisor stated he would encourage its practice and it would not affect his performance standards. Presently, ISC does not have individual performance standards. ISC will continue to accept and register veterans who may not yet be job ready, as well as accepting and registering job ready participants. ISO will be keeping the separate list for the early referrals.

SWA expressed a desire for improved coordination, resolution of common terminology issues (the definition of Suitable Employment is the primary concern). He also expressed a concern related to providing services without "getting credit."

SWA does not differentiate between entered employment and suitable employment. They have agreed that for the demonstration project, they would not close the VR&E referred veterans unless veterans obtained a suitable employment and agreed by the referred VRC.

The inclusion and exchange of SSN was an issue for all partners present. SWA informed us that it is the state policy prohibits the dissemination of electronic information with a persons name and SSN for security reasons.

Recommendation:

SA limit the exchange of privacy information to the last 4 digits of a veteran's SSN. This will eliminated the issue of state policy prohibiting dissemination of name and SSN electronically.

St. Louis Pilot Site

The current MOU will be expanded and signed by the director and state workforce agency executives. The MOU should reflect the roles and responsibilities of all partners as outlined in the TAG. Partners agree that the MOU needs to be updated with field DVOP/LVER roles and responsibilities.

There is good cooperation and coordination between both agencies concerning Job Resource Center, training and employment placement of Chapter 31 participants.

The ISC receives all job ready referrals from the EC and registers them into the workforce center system. The ISC will also assign a DVOP or LVER according to location of veteran. The ISC will follow up with DVOPs and LVERs to ensure accountability with VR&E referrals. However, the St. Louis pilot site does not complete monthly feedback or progress reports to ensure services are being provided. Therefore, JWG members shared a sample report used by the Oakland pilot site, with the agency partners to assist them in developing their own monthly report to ensure accountability.

SA has a reporting system in place that is called the "Tool Data System, Tool Box #2." This system reflects the case management system. SA and VR&E staff are working together to get approval for the EC to gain access to the system. ISC will train the EC on how to use the system.

VR&E Officer and SA do not agree with the early registration of Chapter 31 participants as outlined in the TAG. The SA has refused to do this since the reporting system automatically exits a participant when a service has not been provided over a 90 day period. This negatively impacts the SA's performance outcomes.

Recommendation:

Training should be provided by Ron Shroyer at the SA's training conference held April 23-24, 2008. The training will cover the partnership project and TAG.

St. Petersburg Pilot Site

St. Petersburg has been actively applying the MOU they developed together for years, which is dated 03/01/2005. The MOU reflects the roles and responsibilities of each agency to ensure maximum effectiveness and efficiency are achieved in providing services and assistance to eligible veterans. The local assignments and scheduling of ISC's are determined by local Regional Workforce Boards (RWB), in coordination with the Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI), Workforce Florida Incorporated (WFI), and after consultation with the State Director, Veterans Employment and Training Service (DVET). Florida's SA has 24 separate RWB. The RWB for regions 1, 2, 3, and 4, are assigned to the VR&E Office in Montgomery, which we will not discuss here.

All other regions work with four VR&E offices. Therefore, during the visit a conference call was held with VR&E offices located in Jacksonville, Ft. Lauderdale, and Orlando and included the VR&E supervisors, ISC's, and EC's. The following is a summary of the conference call:

Jacksonville:

The interaction between both agencies is very positive. The ISC, EC, and counselor work very well together as a team. SA/VR&E job seeking skills training is provided to job ready veterans 90 days prior to placing the veteran in the job ready status. Job seeking skills training is provided by the Regional Workforce Board. The ISC is assigned on a full time basis. Communication between the VR&E supervisor and the local director of the Regional Workforce Board are outstanding.

Orlando:

The Orlando VR&E office is having problems establishing a working relationship with the local Regional Workforce Office. However, because of the outstanding effort to establish a dialog with the SA, the VR&E site supervisor has established positive communication with the Director of the Regional Workforce Board concerning the objectives of the demonstration site project. The ISC is assigned to VR&E on a half-time basis to reflect two full days, and a half day on Friday.

Ft. Lauderdale:

Ft. Lauderdale SA interaction is outstanding. The ISC is assigned to the VR&E Office on a half-time basis. The Regional Workforce Board provides at least two employment workshops per month. VR&E/SWA provides a last semester employment workshop to include job seeking skills, interviewing skills, and resume writing. The ISC, EC, and counselor work as a team to ensure customer service to veterans. There is an outstanding dialog and cooperation with both agencies.

There are some issues concerning the training of all partners. Because of the local Regional Workforce Boards demographics, it may be difficult to conduct joint training because of financial and management concerns on travel and budget. It was stated that the JWG is addressing the issue concerning travel dollars for the training and implementation of the demonstration project. However, it is also

requested that each VR&E/SA try to have a joint demonstration project workshop to ensure all partners understand the mission of the DOL/VA with the TAG. This may be a difficult task to accomplish due to the 24 separate Regional Workforce Boards, and their directors' preference on training issues, and production performance standards. It was recommended to St. Petersburg to review their current MOU to ensure that it is not outdated and meets the needs of the demonstration site objects and goals. The TAG should be used as a guide to ensure that roles and objectives are met.

No recommendations were made at this time.

Overall Common Themes During the Site Visits

There is no doubt that the ability for ISC's to have "read only" access to C-WINRS will enhance veteran's services under both agencies. There are questions concerning the use of VA computers for ISC's. This has become a security issue that needs to be addressed as well as uniformity. Some regional offices allow "read only" access to C-WINRS for ISC's, but others do not allow this access. This needs to be addressed at the VBACO level for clarification.

There were questions around whether or not ISC's can use VA computers.

The 90 day performance measure requirement needs to be addressed for Chapter 31 participants so they can be registered prior to being job ready and receive other services needed. Montgomery pilot site has implemented a strategy that prevents automatic exiting of participants after no activity for 90 days, which does not negatively impact outcomes. This needs to be shared nationwide.

Security issues around e-mailing confidential information must be discussed by all JWG members. ISC's and VBA should have e-mail capabilities with PKI security measures to ensure privacy.

Travel dollars for the training and implementation of the demonstration project is a concern. VR&E/SWA would like to have joint meeting/workshop to ensure all partners understand the mission of the DOL/VA.

There were many questions concerning SA and VR&E joint training workshops to improve the quality of services for disabled veterans. The big question was: Is there money available to the RO/SA to hold state wide training?