

Agenda

VERMONT STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VTSRC)

Thursday, February 4, 2020, 1:00 PM – 3:30 PM

Zoom (contact 802-760-0574 or kate.larose@vermont.gov for link)

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| 1:00 pm – 1:06 pm | Introductions (Sarah Launderville, Chair) |
| 1:06 pm – 1:07 pm | Approval of Agenda (Sarah Launderville) |
| 1:07 pm – 1:10 pm | Open for Public Comment |
| 1:10 pm – 1:11 pm | Approval of Minutes (Sarah Launderville) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Minutes from December 3, 2020 |
| 1:11 pm – 1:13 pm | Consent Agenda (Sarah Launderville) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• AOE Committee January 7, 2021• Performance Review Committee December 3, 2020• Policy & Procedures Committee January 7, 2021• Steering Committee January 7, 2021• Coordinator’s February 4, 2021 Report |
| 1:13 pm – 1:23 pm | Director’s Report (Diane Dalmasse) |
| 1:23 pm – 1:43 pm | VR Regional Manager Updates (Hib Doe and Shaun Donahue) |
| 1:43 pm – 1:47 pm | Committee Chair Updates (Chairs)
No written reports. Please refer to minutes above if needed <ul style="list-style-type: none">• AOE Committee• P&P Committee• PR Committee• Steering Committee |
| 1:47 pm – 1:50 pm | Break |
| 1:50 pm – 2:35 pm | Presentation: VR Counselor COVID Panel <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emily Shiels, Transition Counselor, Barre• Meg Lidster, Senior Counselor, St. Albans• Michael Kingsbury, Senior Counselor, Rutland |
| 2:35 pm- 2:50 pm | Update: Reallotment Summary (James Smith) |
| 2:50 pm- 3:00 pm | Update: Ticket to Work (James Smith) |
| 3:00 pm – 3:05 pm | Vote: Chair (Sarah Launderville) |
| 3:05 pm – 3:10 pm | Vote: Vice Chair (Sarah Launderville) |
| 3:10 pm – 3:20 pm | Other Business (Chair) |
| 3:20 pm- 3:30 pm | Round Table (Chair) |
| 3:30 pm | Adjournment (Chair) |

Reallotment Charter Group

Status of Proposed Projects

PROJECT/PROGRAM CHANGE	APPROVED FOR DEVELOPMENT	LEAD STAFF PERSON OR TEAM STATEWIDE OR DISTRICT PROJECT	STATUS AND TIMELINE	POSSIBLE PROJECT MEASURES
[1] Education and Training a Support Services for Consumers				
Creation of a Flex Fund to Support for Training including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping consumers with student debt • Funds to exceed spending guidelines for training • Extra funds for transportation including car repair and purchase 	Yes	Statewide leads Hib Doe and Matt Trieber	Concept needs development and definition	Number of consumers in PS Training or Education Number of consumers who were stuck and are now moving forward
Financial Literacy Training and/or Money Coach. Possibly contract with CVOEO?			Idea Needs Development	
Paying Minimum Wage for Work Experiences	Yes	James	Contract for payroll vendor to go live April 2020	Number of youth and adults participating in work experiences
Contracted courses with CCV such as Intro to College and Careers for Adults		Rich	In exploration phase	Number of courses offered Number of youth and

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				adults participating
Expand College Compass	Yes	Tara	Expansion to three sites in 2021. More next year	Number of sites Number of adults participating
Implement Learn While You Earn Credentialed Programs	Yes	Rich	Resource Construction 101 to launch in April 2021. Other options being developed	Number of programs offered Number of participants Employment outcomes
[2] Technology and Technology Support for Consumers				
Tech Set Aside for consumers	Yes	James	In place November 2020	Usage by District
Tech Coach to support consumers with access to tech and training	Yes	Amanda	Under exploration and development	Number of consumers served
Increasing AT services and accessibility		Donna and Phil	Under exploration	
[3] Increasing Transportation Options and Resources				
Increase thresholds for car purchase and car repair			Idea to be developed under Flex Fund	
Bring back Car Coach			Needs exploration under possible	

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			transportation workgroup	
Various contracted or volunteer ride options			Needs exploration under possible transportation workgroup	
Expand Drivers Education options			Needs exploration under possible transportation workgroup	
[4] Training for DVR and Partner Staff				
Multiple Training ideas for DVR and VABIR staff	Yes	Heather and Donna	James to share list with Heather and Donna	
[5] Improvements to AWARE				
Consumer Portal	Yes	AWARE Governance Team	Summer 2020	
E Sign for Releases	Yes	AWARE Governance Team	Currently being researched	
Other improvements to AWARE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pop up Windows for to dos 		AWARE Governance Team	Needs to be researched	

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Caseload templates for different types of notes • Mass E mail options 				
[6] District Specific Initiatives				
Creation of a process to solicit, review, support and manage district initiatives	Yes		Process and leads need to be identified	
[7] Increase VABIR Capacity				
Provide VABIR staff a raise or one-time bonus		Diane	Under consideration	
Increase VABIR staffing capacity		Diane	Under consideration for some districts	
EC Specialist for Deaf and HOH population		James/Donna	Needs exploration	
[8] Other Ideas				
Increasing Job Coach Capacity		Betsy		
Rolling out Career Training Offset statewide		TBD		

State of Vermont
VocRehab Vermont

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Agency of Human Services

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November 10, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to comment on the Request for Information on Proposed Transfer of Ticket to Work from the Social Security Administration (SSA) to the U.S. Department of Labor. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input on this major policy proposal.

I am the Director of the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). Vermont has been a success story for the Ticket to Work Program. Our state has the highest rate of participation in the country, per capita. As of August 2020, 4,415 beneficiaries out of a total of 32,224 have assigned their Tickets to DVR, which equals 13.7% of the eligible population. This compares to the national average of 2.5%. DVR has helped 2,322 beneficiaries earn enough to achieve Ticket Milestone payments by increasing their earnings. Finally, and most importantly, 891 beneficiaries served by DVR have zeroed out their SSI/SSDI benefits because of work.

Based on our results, we feel we have considerable expertise on the Ticket to Work program and what it takes to help SSI/SSDI beneficiaries transition off benefits to self-sustaining employment. It is also based on this experience that we do not support the move of the program to the U.S. Department of Labor. The following are our major concerns with the proposed move:

America Job Centers (AJC) lack the capacity and expertise to meet the complex needs of SSI/SSDI beneficiaries: The AJCs do an excellent job assisting job seekers access the public workforce system and get the training they need. However, SSI/SSDI beneficiaries are not typical job seekers. The eligibility threshold for SSI/SSDI benefits is very high. Applicants must prove they cannot work at a substantial level to be eligible for benefits. Beneficiaries have significant disabilities that are substantial barriers to employment. However, the services offered by the AJCs are designed to meet the needs of the broader workforce not a very high needs population like SSI/SSDI beneficiaries. AJCs simply do not have the staffing, expertise and infrastructure to serve this population. If the Ticket to Work program was moved to the AJCs, the needs of the broader workforce would always outweigh the needs of a small group of beneficiaries. As a result, inevitably SSI/SSDI beneficiaries would become an afterthought for the program.

The Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Program should remain an SSA program, its funding should be substantially increased: Benefits and work incentive planning has been shown to be one of the most effective interventions to help beneficiaries increase their earnings. In a 2019 Vermont survey, 95% of beneficiaries report that benefits counseling increased their confidence that they could return to work. Benefits counseling is a very technical service and WIPA programs rely on technical assistance and coordination with SSA staff. SSA created the Certified Work Incentive Counselor (CWIC) certification, which ensures staff



providing the service are fully qualified. CWIC staff must work hand in hand with local SSA field staff to be effective. Pulling WIPA out of SSA would undermine the quality and effectiveness of the program. That said, the WIPA program is chronically underfunded and has received no increase since it was authorized under the Ticket to Work, Work Incentives Improvement Act. Benefits counseling is a low cost but high impact service. Investing additional funds in the WIPA program would open the door for many beneficiaries to return to work.

Restructuring the funding mechanisms and performance metrics to align with the WIOA Common Performance Measures will reduce accountability to serve SSI/SSDI beneficiaries: One of the most important features of the Ticket to Work program is that payment is based upon the success of individual beneficiaries. VR and Employment Networks are incentivized to help beneficiaries work to their highest potential. The individualized payment structure means programs are accountable for each beneficiary's success, not broad aggregate program measures. The WIOA Common Performance Measures are broad measures of the success of workforce programs across all workers and job seekers. The measures look at averages rather than individual outcomes. As a result, the measures may be a disincentive to serve the high needs population, like SSI/SSDI beneficiaries. Serving SSI/SSDI beneficiaries may pull down average rates of employment and earnings. Consequently, AJCs may be disincentivized from serving beneficiaries.

Separating the Ticket to Work from the VR Cost Reimbursement Program will undermine the Partnership Plus Model: One promising innovation of the Ticket to Work program has been the Partnership Plus model. The model allows State VR agencies to partner with community programs to provide the long term supports beneficiaries may need to transition off benefits. Under Partnership Plus, VR agencies can receive cost reimbursement for the upfront costs of getting a beneficiary to work and partner providers can get Phase 2 and Outcome Payments for keeping the beneficiary employed. States like Virginia have used this model to greatly expand EN participation in the Ticket program. Under this proposal, cost reimbursement would remain with SSA while the Ticket program would be moved to the AJCs, under a redesigned payment mechanism. This would effectively end Partnership Plus as an option.

Rather than moving the Ticket to Work program, we suggest the federal government look at strategies to promote participation. We think this could be helped by increased coordination at the federal level by the agencies already overseeing services for this population. Specifically, the Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living (ACL) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). These three agencies oversee employment (including supported employment) and independent living services for millions of beneficiaries. We believe a federally mandated working group including SSA, DOL, RSA, ACL and SAMHSA could help substantially increase participation in the Ticket to Work program. For example, state community mental health programs provide evidence based supported employment to hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries. Yet, most of these programs are not participating in the Ticket Program and are missing out on a potential revenue source. If SSA and SAMHSA could collaborate to promote community mental health supported employment programs becoming ENs, it could dramatically increase participation in the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on this RFI. I would be happy to discuss this issue further. Please feel free to contact me at diane.dalmasse@vermont.gov or at 802-777-1109.

Sincerely,

Diane Dalmasse

Diane Dalmasse
Director

