



# **State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies As Change Agents**

## **Systems Change Information Bulletin #1:**

### **Overview of the New Series of Information Bulletins**

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#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this series of Information Bulletins —“State VR Agencies as Change Agents” is to highlight the role that selected State VR agencies are playing in statewide employment-related systems change efforts for persons with disabilities and to share their initiatives with other State VR agencies. The INFORMATION BULLETINS are located at the following website:

[http://disability.law.uiowa.edu/lhpdc.rtc/vr\\_syschange/](http://disability.law.uiowa.edu/lhpdc.rtc/vr_syschange/)

#### **Traditional Roles of State VR Agencies**

Historically, State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies were the primary, and in some cases, the sole agency in a state providing employment-related training to and placement services for persons with disabilities. Generic job training programs receiving federal assistance under CETA and JTPA would often make automatic referrals to State VR agencies of all persons with disabilities, whether or not they qualified for or required comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services. Other state agencies often played little attention to facilitating/supporting employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities.

State VR agencies under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act are required to perform the traditional role of providing **vocational rehabilitation services to eligible individuals** with disabilities in order to achieve employment outcomes, including entering or retaining full-time, or, if appropriate, part-time competitive employment in the integrated labor market; satisfying the vocational outcome of supported employment; or satisfying any other vocational outcome the Secretary of Education may determine to be appropriate.

**Expanded Roles of State VR Agencies** - With the enactment of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), including the enactment of Title I supporting the establishment of a statewide workforce investment system and Title IV of WIA containing amendments to Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the enactment of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, Congress now envisions that State VR agencies will play an expanded role in enhancing gainful employment for individuals with disabilities.

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State VR agencies are now expected to undertake cooperative efforts with **employers** to enhance the employment of individuals with disabilities through, among other things, the provision of technical assistance and support services (whether or not a particular employer is covered by Title I of the ADA).

In addition, State VR agencies are now required to serve as **systems change agents** on behalf of individuals with respect to other components of the statewide workforce investment system established under Title I of WIA as well as with respect to other federal and state programs. In other words, State VR agencies may no longer act in isolation from other state and federal programs—they are expected to facilitate the design, implementation, and evaluation of statewide efforts to enhance the employment of persons with disabilities

The purpose of this series of Information Bulletins—“State VR Agencies as Change Agents” is to highlight the role that selected State VR agencies are playing in:

- Bringing about a fully accessible, universally available workforce investment system that meets the needs of all customers experiencing multiple barriers to employment, particularly individuals with disabilities (through active participation in such initiatives as the navigator program and customized employment) and
- Facilitating transformative systemic changes in and outside the workforce investment system, including:
  - Expanding and improving the availability of employment-related services and supports under the Medicaid state plan and bringing about the enactment and implementation of Medicaid Buy-In programs,
  - Expanding the availability of benefits planning and outreach,
  - Designing and implementing SSDI \$1 for \$2 pilot demonstration projects, and
  - Designing and implementing comprehensive, person-centered statewide work incentive initiatives through playing a leadership role in the state’s Medicaid Infrastructure grant and/or Real Choice systems change initiative.

CSAVR has entered into an arrangement with Bobby Silverstein (former staff director and chief counsel Senate Subcommittee on Disability Policy and currently the director of the Center for the Study and Advancement of Disability Policy) and Allen Jensen (former professional staff with the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the Committee on Ways and Means and currently Director, Work Incentives Project, The George Washington University) to prepare this series of SYSTEMS CHANGE INFORMATION BULLETINS.

SYSTEMS CHANGE INFORMATION BULLETIN #2 will describe opportunities for State VR agency participation in federally-supported statewide employment-related systems change initiatives (including **Medicaid Infrastructure Grants, Work Incentive Planning and Assistance Grants, Disability Program Navigator Initiative Grants, Real Choice Systems Change Grants, and Money Follows the Person Grants**).

SYSTEMS CHANGE INFORMATION BULLETIN #3 will describe how State VR agencies can use a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant **Resource Guide** developed by Jensen. The Resource Guide provides a framework for state-to-state communication, technical

assistance, and multi-state analysis of policy and program development activities regarding statewide employment-related initiatives. The Resource Guide is divided into six sections focusing on such issues as comprehensive interagency collaboration, media and public awareness campaigns, employer relations, benefits counseling, Medicaid Buy-In program design and implementation, personal assistance services, youth transition, and program data development, research and evaluation.

The remaining SYSTEMS CHANGE INFORMATION BULLETINS will provide general information about a particular topic such as the role of State VR agencies in fostering employment through benefits planning and state health care initiatives and then provide examples of promising practices used by particular State VR agencies. (See below for a complete list of initial topics).

Initial topics for the SYSTEMS CHANGE INFORMATION BULLETINS may include:

- Information Bulletin #4 - State VR Participation in Medicaid Infrastructure Grants
- Information Bulletin #5 - The Role of State VR Agencies in Enhancing the Provision of Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (Benefits Planning) and Fostering the Use of Work Incentives Under the SSI and SSDI Programs
- Information Bulletin #6 - The Role of State VR Agencies in Proposing Reforms to Existing Work Disincentives in the SSDI/SSI Programs
- Information Bulletin #7 - The Role of State VR Agencies in Working with Transition-Age Youth
- Information Bulletin #8 - The Role of State VR Agencies in Creating a Universally Accessible Seamless Workforce Investment System (One-Stop Career Centers)
- Information Bulletin #9 - The Role of State VR Agencies in Fostering Employment Through State Health Initiatives (including Medicaid Buy-In Program design and implementation, Waivers, and State Plan provisions supporting employment)
- Information Bulletin #10 - The Role of State VR Agencies in Fostering Employment Outcomes For Individuals Eligible for Assistance From Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and MR/DD Agencies

If your State VR agency is interested in sharing your experience on any of the topics listed above with Bobby and Allen, you may want to contact them directly.

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