# VRS Community Partners Committee Key Messages

**Meeting Date:** Wednesday, October 20, 2021, 9:00am to 12:00pm

## 2021-2022 Committee Charter Reviewed and Ratified

* Committee co-leaders Kim Babine and Chris McVey welcomed new and returning members for the term year that began on September 1, 2021 and ends on August 31, 2022.
* The VRS Community Partners Committee reviewed and ratified an updated charter which it has done annually since the committee was first established in November of 2010.

## VRS Community Partners Forums

* VRS Director of Community Partnerships, Kim Babine began with a few updates on information shared at the October 5 forum which was focused on the following topics: the state’s new COVID vaccination policy, the upcoming 2022 professional/technical (P/T) contracts process, and an early school year check-in on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).
* Committee members expressed challenges related to implementing the state’s new COVID vaccination and testing requirements. While VRS will be required to monitor Community Partners’ compliance with the new state policy at some point in the future, no process or timeline has been set for monitoring compliance with the COVID Vaccine/Testing policy at this time. VRS expects to send a survey out to community partners later this year to learn more about how COVID vaccine/testing policy is being implemented across the state. VRS is committed to building a process that fulfills their responsibility as monitors of state contracts, as well as one that also works for our Community Partners so that quality services can continue for individuals. Kim thanked the community partners for their input and patience as the process is being developed in response to the extended pandemic.
* The CPC also provided input on future VRS Staff and Community Partners Forum. CPC members support the proposal of a 1.5-hour long forum every other month with an interactive format including presentations and Q&A. The final 2021 forum is scheduled for December 7. Suggested topics for future forums included tips and best practices for onboarding new staff in a virtual work environment, feedback on the new E1 PBA, an update on potential WF1 use by community partners, tips for helping businesses invoice for work experience wages, and a refresher on Pre-ETS documentation and billing practices.

## Advisory Dialogue on the State of Disability Employment Services

* The committee discussed their experiences in an extended COVID pandemic environment by sharing their responses to a series of questions. Their responses are summarized as follows:
  + By far, the biggest and most stressful management challenges cited are related to recruiting, supporting, and retaining staff. Staff coverage issues are especially difficult for off-hour services such as job coaching on evenings and weekend shifts. Members asked if VRS could look at providing a rate differential to support after hour services.
  + There was also significant concern for mental health and for supporting the sustained additional stressors on managers.
  + Communication and flexibility have become even more essential in addressing staffing shortages and filling in when needed for job supports.
  + Bright spots that have helped staff during these difficult times include the high availability of jobs and job placements for those interested in work. Others mentioned the positive energy of kids returning to in-person classrooms and the joy it brings staff to see the social connections rebuilding. Members noted they are inspired by the dedication of their teams to helping one another.
  + Several members said the extended staffing shortages have led to greater creativity and flexibility for staff retention. Strategies used include higher wages for new staff with adjustments for existing staff wages, permanent flexible work policies, better working environments, and decreased office space leases and costs.
* VRS Co-leaders Kim Babine and Chris McVey thanked the committee for their reflections and reiterated VRS’s commitment to working together to support the greater disability employment services network through these extra difficult times.

## For More Information

For more information on the CPC, please go to the [CPC page on VRS’s website](https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/councils/cpc.jsp).