



VRS Community Partners + VRS Staff Forum

June 6, 2023

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Housekeeping

- Welcome to the VRS Community Partners + VRS Staff Forum.
- **ASL Interpreters** are designated as “co-hosts”, so they appear at the top of your participant list. If you need ability to “multi-pin” please email Sara.Sundeen@state.mn.us or Janeen.Oien@state.mn.us.
- **Closed Captioning** is available. A livestream is linked in the chat.
- **Your name:** please change the name that Zoom displays to your first and last name. An easy way to rename is: 1) go to the participant list and find your name, 2) hover over your name, 3) select “more,” 4) select “rename.”
- **Questions and Comments:** Please submit feedback, questions, comments via Microsoft Form: [Q&A form](#)
- **Technical Issues:** If you have technical issues, please contact Sara.Sundeen@state.mn.us or Janeen.Oien@state.mn.us.
- **Recording:** The session will be recorded and posted to the VRS website along with the agenda, presentation, and transcript.



Agenda

- **Welcome:** Janeen Oien, Interim VRS Director of Community Partnerships
- **Legislative session updates:** Janeen Oien and Michelle Basham, Deputy Director of Service Operations and Partnerships
- **Managing VRS and CP budgets:** Chris McVey, Deputy Director of Disability Employment Services, and Janeen Oien
- **Meet your Community Partnerships Team:** Program Specialists
- **Q&A:** Anne Paulson, Community Partnerships Program Specialist
- **Wrap Up:** Janeen Oien



Legislative Session Updates

- The 2023 legislation session has been one of the most transformative legislative sessions in state history. DEED staff worked diligently to advance several key initiatives to benefit Minnesota and several of those initiatives positively impact people with disabilities served by VRS. Historic investments were made increasing funding for programs that support Minnesotans with disabilities including increased funding for State Services for the Blind (SSB,) Individual Placement & Support Services (IPS) and the creation of a new Reasonable Accommodation Fund to name a few of the legislative advancements.

How does this impact funding for VRS programs?

- The Centers for Independent Living (CIL) received the largest increase in 30 years. For state fiscal years 24-25, the CILs will receive \$7,011,000 each year. The base for this appropriation is \$3,011,000 in state fiscal year 2026 and each year thereafter
- Individual Placement and Supports (IPS) provides critically needed, evidence-based supports to people living with serious mental illness. As a result of VRS and community advocates working diligently, IPS will receive \$2,555,000 million dollars each year for fiscal years 24 and 25 and an increase of \$2,500,000 million dollars per year for fiscal years 24 and 25.



How does this impact funding for VRS programs?

- Minnesota legislators also passed a bill that will positively impact Extended Employment Services (EE). The EE base will continue to be \$6,995,000 from the general fund and \$6,830,000 from the workforce development fund for fiscal years 24-25. In addition, \$4,500,000 has been appropriated from the general fund for each year to maintain prior rate increases for providers of extended employment services for persons with severe disabilities.
- For state fiscal years 24-25, \$1,000,000 was appropriated each year from the workforce development fund for employment services for persons, including transition age youth, who are deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing.



Other Legislative Updates

- Minnesota legislators also passed a bill (*Chapter 63 – H.F.100*) that will legalize the recreational use of Adult Cannabis. This means the use of Adult Cannabis will be legal in Minnesota but remains illegal at the Federal government level.
- This bill allows for expungement of past offenses, which will be impactful for jobseekers
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services receives substantial funding from the federal government. VRS can not support an employment placement or small business plan within the Adult Cannabis industry.
- DEED will have funding for three programs that provide financing for workforce development, small business loans, and technical assistance related to cannabis businesses and workforce CanStartup, CanNavigate and CanTrain.



Managing VRS and Community Partner budgets

Managing VRS and Community Partner budgets: VRS responsibilities

- It is imperative our agency does a good job of managing our open encumbrances. We never get billed for many authorizations that we write and these need to be canceled. This happens for a variety of reasons. Good communication between VR professionals, VR Support Staff, and the Community Partner is essential!
- It is our responsibility to spend some time monitoring expired authorizations (open encumbrances). If an authorization is not going to be used, the lines on the PO in SWIFT need to be cancelled and the amount will then be available for use by another participant
- Vocational Rehabilitation Techs and Support Staff should take the responsibility of monitoring the open encumbrances for their team. This means they need to review the 60-day report at least monthly, possibly have some investigative work done and reduce the amount on the PO or cancel the line(s) on a PO that will not be used.

Managing VRS and Community Partner budgets: CP responsibilities

- Invoice requirements are outlined in Section 5, Consideration and Payment, of this Master Contract or in the Community Partner Guide (mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/partners/guide/contracted-services/billing).
- The following constitutes an “undisputed invoice” that is ready for payment.
 - The Contractor presents an itemized invoice for the services actually performed with required elements of the invoice as detailed in the Community Partner Guide (mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/partners/guide/contracted-services);
 - The Contractor presents required documentation as detailed in the Community Partner Guide (mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/partners/guide/contracted-services); and
 - The State's Authorized Direct Service Staff Representative accepts the services as satisfactory, the invoice as satisfactory, and the required documentation as satisfactory.



Managing VRS and Community Partner budgets:CP responsibilities

Invoices **must be** submitted **within 90 days** from the end date of the Work Authorization.

Invoices received after 90 days **will not be paid.**



Meet your Community Partnerships Team!



Michelle Basham, Deputy Director VRS, Operations/Partnerships

- Leads five business areas/managers including finance, research, contracts, communications/equity and IT/purchasing. Also represents VRS in MOU-IFA negotiations and lease negotiations across state.
- 25+ years of leadership experience in the nonprofit and public sector. Most work advocating for youth experiencing homelessness and sexual exploitation.
- Education includes law degree, masters public administration and Humphrey Fellowship.
- Since 2016, I've been an adjunct professor at Mitchell Hamline School of Law.
- Fun Fact? When I am not working, I am spending time with our family's two rescue dogs, two rescue cats and foster cats/kittens. Right now, we are fostering four kittens which is fun but a lot of work!



Janeen Oien, Interim Director of Community Partnerships

- P/T Program Specialist currently serving as Interim Director of the (7-member strong!) CP Team.
- I serve as a liaison between contracted partners and VRS staff supporting partners in the metro, southern MN, as well as serving as Lead/Co-facilitator on a variety of meetings and workgroups.
- I worked for 18 years in Special Education in Oregon schools and day-treatment centers before starting at Oregon DHS – VRS as a support staff. I started with MN DEED – VRS in the Brooklyn Park office as a VR Tech in April 2016. I joined the CP team in April 2021.
- Live in Crystal with my 2 dogs and 17-year-old daughter. I have two adult children and the world’s most awesome granddaughter.
- Fun Fact: while I love living in the Metro area, and the energy of cities, I grew up in rural Southwestern MN on a dairy farm that has been in my family for 3 generations. I still occasionally help family with spring planting and fall harvest, but no longer have to milk any cows.



Jess Outhwaite, P/T Contract Program Specialist

- As a P/T Program Specialist, I support community partners and VRS staff. I work with partners from Northern MN and the Metro.
- Work collaboratively with community partners to ensure quality services are provided within the guidelines of their P/T Contract. Provide continued support and training throughout their contract.
- Work collaboratively with VRS staff to support working relationships and training regarding partners and community partner contracts.
- Currently working on WF1 Partner Access and a developing a Programmatic Contract Review Process.
- I live in rural Central MN, where we have a dog, a lizard, 6 cats, 2 goats and 13 ducks. When I'm not hanging with my zoo, you can usually find me at a swim meet cheering on my two kiddos.
- I previously worked for a Central MN Community Partner and joined VRS as a Counselor in 2013. I moved to the Community Partnerships team about two years ago.
- Fun Fact – I really love the color purple!



Anne Paulson, P/T Contract Program Specialist

- P/T Program Specialist develop and implement Request for Proposal (RFP). application process for new and renewing providers
- Currently working with partners in the North and Metro providing support and guidance to our partner and VRS staff.
- I live in St Paul and really enjoy the seasons and park and rec system! I bought a small house over 1 1/2 ago and live with 2 cats and a dog. I am planning on having chickens next!
- Professional background – 20 years with VRS; VRS Counselor in the metro area, and CP Program Specialist for 15 years; prior to working with VRS I worked under Ticket to Work in CO as a CWIC; I have experience working for an AIDS Service Organization in WI and working with female offenders in a family reunification program and reentry into life.



Sara Sundeen, P/T Contract Program Specialist

- Program specialist between contracted partners and VRS staff supporting partners in the metro, southern MN and Title 1 partners
- Co-facilitates Metro Pre-ETS Community of Practice and CP Conversations
- Masters' degree from UW-Madison and I worked in the field of Vocational Rehabilitation for over 20 years.
- Started as a counselor in North and NE Minneapolis with VRS in 2016, worked with Staff Development implementing Person-Centered Practices and have been in this role since May 2020
- Worked as a community partner providing placement services and managing a vocational department
- Live in Robbinsdale, MN with my husband and children. I enjoy gardening, reading, cheering on my kids at various sporting events, being creative and traveling. Family and friends are very important to me.
- Fun Fact? I have many things related to travel on my bucket list – one is going (as a spectator) to the Olympic Games. The plan is LA '28!

Claire Courtney, IPS Program Specialist and Behavioral Health Specialist for VRS

- **Claire Courtney** M.S., CRC Rehabilitation Specialist, Community Partnerships Claire.courtney@state.mn.us 651.5038427
- **Key Responsibilities:**
- Develop and deliver training and technical assistance to VR staff serving persons with serious mental illnesses.
- Contract Manager for Individual Placement and Support (IPS) State grant program. Lead the IPS State team and lead reviewer for all IPS fidelity reviews. Develop and provide training and technical assistance to IPS programs and partners including MH treatment providers and VRS staff members. Prepare legislative report on the IPS State grants program. Liaison to the International IPS Learning Community.
- DEED-VRS representative on: MN Behavioral Health Advisory Council, State Mental Health Advisory Council and Minnesota Interagency Council on Preventing and Ending Long Term Homelessness.
- Provide guidance to VR leadership, policy, learning and staff development teams on evidence-based practices including Employment services to persons with serious mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders.
- Liaison to the Department of Human Services (DHS) - Behavioral Health Division and MH Advocacy groups such as NAMI-MN, Mental Health Minnesota and Wellness in the Woods.
- Provide training and technical assistance regarding CARF accreditation for VRS and EE staff and our accredited community partners or those interested in pursuing accreditation.
- Fun Fact: I do Bavarian (German) Folk Dancing and can be seen performing at many German functions and events in Minnesota, Surrounding States and even in Germany!



Brad Westerlund, CIL/Deaf&HOH Grant Program Specialist

- Program Specialist with over 20 years' experience managing grants for VRS, which include grants with Centers for Independent Living, Deaf and Hard of Hearing programs, as well as Extended Employment providers statewide.
- Serve as the liaison between VRS and the Administration on Community Living (ACL) for our Federal and State appropriations for Independent Living services, including the monitoring and compliance of CIL programs and services statewide.
- I reside in the north metro area with my wife, daughter and twin boys! We are an avid hockey and lacrosse family and enjoy all the outdoor activities this great state has to offer!



Meghan Hanson, EE Program Specialist

- New Program Specialist with the Extended Employment Program.
- 20 years working in nonprofits as a community partner of which include 15 years providing EE services to individuals both offering direct supports and managing the program for a local CRP.
- I live in Monticello with my 3 boys and our yellow lab Silver. I have a 9 year old and twin 7 year olds. My boys live and breathe motocross so we spend a large portion of our time camping at motocross tracks and racing. In my own time I enjoy spending time on the lake and reading or attending live music events.
- I love trivia games, especially music trivia and used to be a trivia DJ.

Discussion – Questions and Answers

Please submit questions and comments using the Microsoft Form linked in the chat and listed below.

[MS Form for Q&A](#)



Thank You!



We'd love to hear your feedback on our VRS Community Partner + VRS Staff Forums.

Please provide your thoughts in the Microsoft Form below. The forum feedback questions are at the end of the form.

[MS Form for Q&A and Forum Feedback](#)

Funding Notice

The VR program receives 78.7 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2022, the total amount of grant funds is \$44,081,347. The required state match for these funds is \$11,930,529 (21.3 percent). The state of Minnesota has appropriated \$14.3 million to exceed the matching requirement.