DEED / Vocational Rehabilitation Services

VRS Community Partners Committee

Friday, February 28, 2020 – 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

VRS St Paul Fairview Office

# VRS Community Partners Committee

# Meeting on February 28, 2020

Key Messages for the Greater Vocational Rehabilitation Community:

*Note: Key Messages are first distributed via.govdelivery approximately one week after the meeting and posted on the DEED website.*

**New Charter for 2020-2021 Ratified**

* The VRS Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) Advisory Committee has developed and ratified a charter annually since it was first established in November of 2010. This year’s charter includes a few significant changes starting with the name of the Committee which has been renamed the VRS Community Partners Committee (CPC) to more fully represent the broad range of VR service partners including Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs), Limited Use Vendors (LUVs) and Centers for Independent Living (CILs).
* Effective January 2020, the Community Partner Committee will shift from a calendar year term to a school year schedule. Changing the 12-month period to begin in September and end with August will help to capitalize on the momentum that is built September through May. While there are no scheduled meetings in June, July, and August, the term includes the summer months should a special call or session be called to address specific needs.
* Given 2020 is a transition year for term year redefinition, members whose terms were to end December 2019 will complete year and a half terms ending August 2020. New members with terms that started January 2020 will have year and a half first terms ending August 2021. This transition ‘year’ will run January 2020 through August 2021.

**Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Resource and Training Needs**

* Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) were established and mandated with the 2014 federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA requires all state VR programs to use 15% of federal budgets for Pre-ETS services.
* The federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) which is responsible for the federal VR Program including Pre-ETS recently released 52 pages of new guidance for a 30-day public comment period. The guidance is intended to help clarify ways Pre-ETS funds (15% reserve) may be used for costs associated with providing certain VR services to eligible students with disabilities, in accordance with approved IPEs, who need those services to benefit from pre-employment transition services, as well as the costs associated with the pre-employment transition services themselves.
* On March 25th, VRS will provide information on the new Pre-ETS toolkit and other online resources as part of a live Webinar with a question and answer portion. VRS is also planning to design and deliver a set of regional meetings before next fall to help disseminate Pre-ETS information, ideas and questions. Yet another option, VRS will host monthly live ‘Question and Answer’ sessions via technology to continue learning opportunities related to Pre-ETS. More information will be sent out via govdelivery.
* Committee members expressed appreciation and interest in Pre-ETS resources and training options and recommended that VRS provide clear descriptions of the training content and level of detail so that community partners can better determine who would benefit from the training. In addition, they asked that VRS include options for deaf/accessible services as well as online options to increase the opportunities for statewide access and affordability to Pre-ETS training and resources.

**VR Professional and Technical Contracts: Framework Updates and Dialogue**

* VRS Director of Community Partnerships, Kim Babine began the afternoon dialogue with a refresher on DEED and DHS’s shared intentions to expand the number of providers who have both VR contracts and 245D credentials in support of Employment First and the interagency MOU. As of December 2019, there are approximately 120 CRPs and 400 245D providers.
* In addition, RSA indicated at the August 2019 federal monitoring visit, that Minnesota needs to improve its contract framework and processes. These two powerful drivers are causing VRS to seek advisory input from the committee on VRS’ contracting process.
* **Advisory input on contract provider standards and rate setting methodology:**
  + There was general agreement from committee CRP members that CARF accreditation provide more rigorous and comprehensive service standards than 245D standards, which members experience as having more of a compliance focus and which are evolving closer to CARF services standards over time.
  + Some of the other benefits that CRPs value with CARF provider standards include:
    - Members credited CARF with helping them create the administrative, program and governance framework for their organizations based on standards, best practices and networking with the reviewers from other states. They noted CARF is most valuable earlier on as organizations develop or when adding new programs.
    - The monitoring process facilitates more consistent, high standards beyond an ‘honor system’ approach and helps drive consistency within the organization that benefits a provider’s administrative, service and governance policies and practices.
    - While CARF accreditation visits are time intensive and exhausting, they are currently viewed as the only review that broadly evaluates administration, policy, safety, and participant survey outcomes. One member noted that CARF included 2,000 standards in their most recent review.
    - Members also cited the important quality-oriented feedback that helps providers to identify continuous improvement areas, address common challenges, and provide opportunities to showcase their service delivery and measurable outcomes.
    - CARF provides a shared language for VR service providers. In addition, all county contracts and regional contracts also require CARF accreditation.
  + Some of the barriers to being dual providers (CARF and 245D) that the committee recommended be considered with the anticipated interagency service provider alignment work include:
    - Billing systems for waiver systems vs. the VRS system are very different and create training and administrative burdens. Members recommend that paperwork requirements should be reviewed and streamlined where possible.
    - Contract rates can vary for similar services and in some cases do not provide enough reimbursement to cover the cost of operations. Other contract factors mentioned to consider in order to enable adequate service provider access and quality statewide: population density/geographic territories, service demand levels, transportation, and period of contract rates.
  + VRS asked for advisory input on ways to increase VR service capacity to meet unmet needs including updates to the contract standards for Limited Use Vendors (LUVs) which have not been updated for many years. Regional Director Jay Hancock noted that for one of the VR teams in the Southern Region he manages there are three counties without any VR service providers beyond VR staff. Increasing the current LUV contract cap of $20,000 could provide viable incentive for additional providers to join and help address the unmet needs VR is responsible for serving in Minnesota.
  + Committee members agreed that the current LUV contract cap is outdated and does not present a viable business opportunity. They strongly advised VRS to look closely at entry and ongoing quality standards for LUVs as part of VRS’ review and updating study in areas including person centered planning, documentation, accounting, safety, and community outreach.
  + VRS will continue to seek, consider and incorporate community partner input on strategic, systemic efforts including increasing Minnesota’s base of dual providers and the VR contract framework to support sustainable access to quality services statewide.

*End of Key Messages*