

Resource

To: VRS Community Partners

From: VRS Community Partnerships Team

Re: Communication Strategies for Community Partners with VRS Teams

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Date: March 2022

Why Should I Communicate with Local VRS Teams?

Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) relies upon a broad coalition of Community Partners to provide services to individuals with disabilities. VRS is committed to partnering with qualified and quality service providers so that individuals who receive Vocational Rehabilitation services may also choose which partner organization to receive services from.

Referrals and work authorizations to a Community Partner are determined by the service needs of an individual in the Vocational Rehabilitation program, as assessed by the individual (or their authorized representative, if applicable) and Vocational Rehabilitation program staff, and by the individual's choice of a service provider. To make an informed choice about who their service provider will be, an individual has access to the entire list of Community Partners to choose from. With over 165 VRS Community Partners, that list can be daunting. Vocational Rehabilitation program staff can assist individuals in making informed choices by providing individuals information about Community Partners and their service availability, geographic service area, and other pertinent factors. This informed choice process is required by federal law, federal regulation, and federal sub-regulatory guidance.

Because of this process, it is helpful for VRS Community Partners to introduce themselves to local VR program teams and maintain regular communication about service availability, service offerings, etc.

Communicating with Local Teams

Here is some advice for communicating with local VRS Teams:

- Email the manager for the Vocational Rehabilitation offices in the geographic area where your organization would like to provide services. In VRS, our team managers are called a Rehabilitation Area Manager (RAM). Ask to schedule a meeting. Your VRS Community Partnerships Team contract liaison can help you determine which offices to reach out to.
 - Here's a draft script for emailing the RAM

My organization, ABCDE LLC, has a (new) contract with Vocational Rehabilitation Services. I am interested in introducing (reintroducing) myself and my organization's services to you and your team. I understand that many teams accomplish this by inviting a service provider to attend a team meeting. I would be grateful to accept an invitation to a team meeting for this purpose. Please let me know what you would like for next steps.

- We suggest being responsive and flexible when arranging to meet with a team. If you have a scheduling conflict with a meeting that has been arranged, please be sure to reach out to the RAM and ask to reschedule.
- We recommend that you prepare a brief “elevator speech” about your agency, your service delivery model, and the services you offer on your contract.
 - Include some information about your experience, passion, training, and skills in working with individuals who experience disability, and your commitment to assisting them to achieve Competitive Integrated Employment.
 - Highlight any unique strengths your agency might possess (second languages spoken, specific competencies, high retention of skilled staff, ties to specific communities, schools, networks.)
 - Describe the services on your VRS contract that you plan to provide.
 - Highlight any services on your contract for which you currently don’t have adequate staffing and whether there is a waitlist for any of those services.
 - Highlight your availability for referrals for certain services.
 - Teams will be excited to hear if you have employment specialists ready to do job search, if you have Pre-ETS on your contract, and if you just hired new job coaches that are ready for referrals.
 - Provide contact information for referrals, and include website, flyers, or other informational material. You can put this information in the chat of the virtual meeting and email them to the RAM before or after.
- Be prepared to be flexible. Every VRS team is different: some teams like a presentation and some prefer a more casual dialogue. Ask each RAM what their team would prefer.
- Vocational Rehabilitation staff are most interested in your current service area so they can think about current individuals needing services. Vocational Rehabilitation staff must know that an individual will get services in a timely fashion. If your organization is willing to expand your geographic service area, we can have conversations about what expanding to a new area might look like. At no point will VRS ever be able to guarantee any number of referrals, but we can have conversations about service needs.
- If your organization has not provided VRS services before, you may notice some of the technical jargon for employment services might be different from what your organization is used to. Your VRS Community Partnerships Team contract liaison can assist you with some of the VRS jargon used when you are developing your communications. Understanding the terminology your organization is familiar with and how it translates to VRS terminology which will help your introduction go smoothly. You can also find many of the service definitions on the [Community Partner webpage](#).
- Your VRS Community Partnerships Team contract liaison is open to attend team meetings with you to support your introduction. If this is something you’re interested in, please ask the RAM if your liaison can be invited to the meeting. The RAM might also choose to invite your liaison.

Contact Information

Here is contact information for local teams for your reference.

- VRS Field Staff Directory: https://mn.gov/deed/assets/field-staff-directory_tcm1045-131440.pdf
- VRS RAM Directory: https://mn.gov/deed/assets/rams-directory_tcm1045-131447.pdf

We are here to help! Your VRS Community Partnerships Team contract liaison can review your communications, flyers, or marketing materials and make suggestions if needed. To find out which Community Partnerships Program Specialist is the dedicated liaison for a particular Community Partner, go to: <https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/partners/listing>.

- Janeen Oien: Community Partnerships Program Specialist, 763-204-1354, Janeen.Oien@state.mn.us.
- Jess Outhwaite: Community Partnerships Program Specialist, 763-233-8829, Jessica.Outhwaite@state.mn.us.
- Anne Paulson: Community Partnerships Program Specialist, 651-259-7135, Anne.Paulson@state.mn.us.
- Sara Sundeen: Community Partnerships Program Specialist, 651-247-9121, Sara.Sundeen@state.mn.us.