

VRS Community Partners Committee

Key Messages

Meeting Date: October 19, 2022

2022-2023 Committee Charter Reviewed and Ratified

- Committee co-leaders Kim Babine, Chris McVey and Amanda Jensen-Stahl welcomed new and returning members for the term year that began on September 1, 2022 and ends on August 31, 2023.
- The VRS Community Partners Committee reviewed and ratified an updated charter which it has done annually since the committee was first established in November 2010.

Highlights from October's National Disability Employment Awareness Month

- VRS Manager of Interagency Partnerships and Business Engagement, Amanda Jensen-Stahl, shared her excitement in DEED's participation in October's National Disability Employment Awareness Month which included an online celebration event on October 10th. VRS Business Consultant Marci Jasper shared a few of the real-life video profiles from the event where people with disabilities who tapped into VRS services as part of their career planning and process for securing competitive integrated employment shared their experiences in their own words. The recorded event can be watched in its entirety using this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9Gmx-NfkxQ>.
- Committee members shared more examples of working with people with disabilities in their employment exploration, job search, hiring and ongoing services across a variety of disability types, challenges, and locations.

VRS Update on Federal Grant Award

- The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and its Vocational Rehabilitation Services program (VRS) have received a five-year, \$13 million Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) grant from the U.S. Department of Education. DEED and VRS will partner with DEED's State Services for the Blind (SSB), along with the Minnesota Departments of Human Services and Education to support Minnesotans with disabilities in finding employment opportunities that pay at least minimum wage.
- The grant will help with creating a demonstration project titled "Go MN!" which will offer 1,200 people with disabilities - working in or contemplating subminimum wage work - the opportunity to explore careers with some of the many Minnesota businesses in the high-growth, high-demand transportation industry. Employers participating in the project will commit to paying at least minimum wage. Over the five-year period, the project will adopt the Progressive Employment Model to connect students, youth, and adults across multiple counties in Northeast Minnesota, the Twin Cities metro area, and Southwest Minnesota with these work experiences. This approach will serve VRS and SSB customers with disabilities as well as their employer customers.
- Minnesota is home to nearly 6,000 people earning below minimum wage due to their having a disability, one of the highest in the nation. The purpose of this grant is to decrease the use of subminimum wages and increase access to competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities.

Discussion on Virtual and In-Person Services

- VRS Director of Community Partnerships, Kim Babine, engaged the committee in a conversation about the current state of virtual and in-person services being provided across the state.
- The extended pandemic environment has resulted in many more people who have better access to, as well as greater comfort level in using, virtual technologies and tools which has contributed to higher use of virtual services for employment services. Some members noted that there are still parts of Minnesota that do not have broadband or reliable access needed for virtual services.
- Members agreed that the overall guiding consideration impacting the decision to pursue virtual vs. in-person services is providing services according to the served individual's personal preference whenever feasible. Members agreed that in-person services are necessary if an individual is not engaging with services delivered virtually.
- Members reported in-person service delivery was preferred by many providers, individuals, and VRS staff due to the ability to build a relationship between the individual and the provider staff. Members also reported that in-person services are often more effective for more intensive work such as placement services. Pre-ETS services are commonly delivered in-person on location at partner schools around the state.
- Members shared virtual services are particularly effective for supplementing in-person services, such as for shorter check-in and follow-up meetings. Virtual meetings can also be an efficient way to connect a larger group of individuals – such as meetings with county case managers and other members of an individual's team.
- VRS Regional Director Jay Hancock shared that VRS has begun piloting in-home services as part of Minnesota's VR program commitment to meeting people where they prefer to engage in services.
- Kim thanked committee members for sharing their perspectives and experiences with both virtual and in-person service delivery for timely and helpful insights into current use trends, challenges, successes, and outcomes.

Next meeting

Next meeting of the CPC is on Wednesday, December 7, 2022.

For More Information

For more information on the CPC, please go to the [CPC page on VRS's website](#).

2022-2023 VRS Community Partners Committee Members

In alphabetical order:

- Anisa Ali, Lead the Way MN / Metro Region
- Kim Babine, VRS Director of Community Partnerships – Committee Co-Leader
- Michelle Basham, VRS Deputy Director of Service Operations and Partnerships – Committee Co-Sponsor
- Anna Cahak, ProAct, Inc. / Metro Region
- Dana Einfeld, Kaposia, Inc. / Metro Region
- Vanessa Gallagher, Tran\$Em / North Region
- Jennifer Germain, VRS Rehabilitation Area Manager / Metro Region
- Melissa Grover, KCQ / South Region

- Jay Hancock, VRS Regional Director Representative - South Region
- Kassia Janezich, Tasks Unlimited / Metro Region
- Amanda Jensen-Stahl, VRS Manager of Interagency Partnerships and Business Engagement – Committee Co-Leader
- Denise Johnson, PHASE Industries / North Region
- Randa Lundmark, VRS Rehabilitation Area Manager / North Region
- Chris McVey, VRS Deputy Director of Disability Employment Services – Committee Co-Sponsor / Co-Leader
- Julie Peterschick, Productive Alternatives / North Region
- Robert Reedy, RISE / Metro Region
- Alanna Rice, Leading Prospects / Metro Region
- Karla Tauer, VRS Rehabilitation Area Manager / South Region
- Sarah Timmerman, Ability Building Center / South Region
- Dee Torgerson, VRS State Director – Committee Co-Sponsor
- Sheila Ward, WCI / South Region

Facilitator: Holly Johnson, Lanterna Consulting Inc.