

LIGHTLY EDITED FILE
Vocational Rehabilitation
Services - DEED
VRS Community Partners + VRS
Staff Forum
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>> Janeen: Good morning, everyone.
We'll get started in just a minute.

[recording in progress]

>> Janeen: Good morning, everyone.
We are going to wait just about two more minutes and
let as many people as possible join us before we get
started.

Sara, do you mind putting up the welcome slide?

Good morning, everyone.

We're just going to give it another minute and then we will welcome everyone here.

Lori Thorpe, our director, will kick us off here in just a couple minutes.

Thank you.

>> Lori: Good morning, everyone.

My name is Lori Thorpe and I'm the new director of contracts and partnerships here at VRS.

And so good to see so many of you here today and we'll just keep admitting people as they join.

And before we get started we'll just go through a little bit of housekeeping on the next slide.

So we do have two ASL interpreters with us today.

We have David and Gina.

So they are cohosts and if needed they'll appear at the top of your screen.

So thank you for that.

If you need any ability to multi-pin, please e-mail

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Jess Outhwaite and her e-mail is here on the screen.

We do have closed captioning available and a livestream is linked within our chat.

If you haven't already, please go in and change the Zoom name that you have to your first and last name and how you do that is you can go to the participant list and find your name, you hover over it and select "more" and then you can select "rename."

So, nice and easy.

And for questions and comments today, we do have a form that we use and it's a Microsoft Form and there's a link here that you can use, so that's how we take our Q & As and then at the end of the presentation today we'll answer those questions.

Any technical issues at all that you're having, again, please contact Jessica Outhwaite and her address is here and she will help troubleshoot that with you.

And the recording today, this will be recorded and then we add it to our community website so that you can go back and watch this presentation and see the transcript.

Wonderful.

And we'll just keep admitting people.

And today we're going to have a nice presentation about Extended Employment.

And so there will be a panel group here that will lead us in that.

Also then we're going to hear from Janeen Oien about the contracts services group that should get kicked off sometime at the end of this month.

Then we'll have a Q & A session and then we'll wrap it up for the day.

So thank you so much.
I'm going to turn it over to Janeen and Meghan.

>> Janeen: Actually, Meghan, I believe it's just you.

>> Meghan: Okay.

Good morning, Meghan Hanson, I'm the EE program specialist and as Lori mentioned we're going to talk a little bit about EE today.

And Lori is the director of our CP team so that makes her the director Extended Employment employment, and then I am Extended Employment employment program specialist.

I've been in more role for about three months, maybe four months now.

So have had an opportunity to meet a lot of the EE

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providers, some I've known before and I've been enjoying getting to know others.

So just to talk a little bit about EE, the Extended Employment program is a program that provides long-term supports, extended supports to help Minnesotans with significant disabilities who are in the workforce and supporting them in keeping that job.

And also advancing in their careers.

So not just retaining the specific job but really helping them to move forward in their chosen career.

And the some of the statistics with the additional funds that were appropriated this last year, the EE team now receives \$18.325 million a year.

And then state fiscal year '22 is where these numbers come from.

We haven't compiled '23 yet, we'll do that once the EE programs have all been audited later this year.

For '22 we had -- 2,840 people who were served and they earned a combined \$34.3 million in average wages which I think demonstrate dollars the people we're serving are making decent wages, at least many of them are.

And currently there are 27 community providers that have an existing EE contract.

They one thing I think is amazing about the EE program is the providers are scattered throughout the state.

So for those of you who are here today and if you are not an EE provider but you think that you have someone who doesn't receive a county waiver but would benefit from longer term supports than your program might offer, it would be a great idea to be able to with one of those other providers then too.

And some of the services that EE provider provides include trainings so when somebody's starting a new job, EE can provide some of that initial training as

they're getting started, ensuring that they get the one on one assistance that they might need if their supervisor isn't able to provide that to the level they would benefit from, maybe retraining job tasks, so if something's going on, there's a chance in their job and they just need to relearn something, you know, a lot of the same things that job coaching might provide, dealing with schedule changes, adjusting to new supervisors or managers.

As we know that is actually one of the areas that probably is the biggest need is when there's a new supervisor, that can be very difficult to navigate.

So EE is service available for that.

Advancing to new job tasks or positions and then just

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managing changes in life that might impact them at work.

And these are kind of the primary services that are available, but, you know, EE is intended to provide long-term supports, so I know when I was working as a provider and we would also assist with things like just addressing issues with their supervisor and, you know, kind of navigating those different conversations that might be difficult too.

So.

>> Janeen: Thanks, Meghan.

I think we're going to hand it over to Chelsea Garvin from Lifeworks now, thank you.

>> Hello, like Janeen said I am Chelsea Garvin, and I'm going to talk about these types of employment.

We do go further into them on these slides.

There are three types of employment that our CRP -- there's also community employment for EE, which includes work crews and enclaves and then center based employment that will be phased out by 2026, and that is EE for work that is done at a provider site and I'm going to pass it on to Nate Lotton -- no, I'm sorry, Kassia, to talk a little bit more about supported employment specifically.

>> Thanks, Chelsea.

My name is Kassia and I'm in the supported employment in the metro.

A little bit more about supported employment, EE again is really geared towards providing similar supports for folks that are not currently receiving waived supports.

The supported employment category is geared towards providing ongoing support for folks that are entering into jobs that they're finding either following, going through some sort of VRS service, could be a PBA but

could also be a direct referral to a provider if somebody is finding a job and providers know that they will need ongoing supports to keep that job.

Some examples of what this might look like, you know, we work primarily with folks with severe and persistent mental illness, which is cyclical.

We oftentimes see people do really well at getting jobs but not always, sometimes hitting some barriers with keeping their jobs.

So we'll provide those ongoing supports to make sure that when they do hit a tougher time of year that we

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can help make sure that they keep their job during that time of year and have the supports in place to do so.

So how are supports provided?

Well, they're sort of geared towards whatever -- it's very person centered so what that person needs and wants from us, we do a lot to build relationships with people, knowing that that's oftentimes how we hear about things up front.

But we'll go out to job sites, we'll meet with people in the community at a coffee shop, following the pandemic we now have the ability to meet people virtually as well but we try to meet with people wherever works best for them under the guise that the more support that we can offer the more likely it is that they will keep and retain that job on an ongoing basis.

And another sort of common question that I get is our support's time limit -- are supports time limited, and the short answer is no.

This is really geared towards what the person is looking for from the provider.

We encourage folks that we serve to try to stay with us for at least six months knowing that if we can get people through the first six months of their job they're in much better shape to keep that job short-term.

Next slide, please.

Thank you.

So in addition to supported employment where we're supporting folks in competitive and integrated employment there's also a community employment option under the Extended Employment program, and what it is varies based on provider, but oftentimes it is either enclave, enclave work or provider owned businesses that individuals are working in.

Tasks Unlimited, for instance, we have a janitorial business where we have county and federal contracts throughout the metro.

It's not a 14C position so folks come into our work and are paid competitive wages -- competitive wages,

starting at 16 plus dollars an hour at county sites and 17 plus an hour at federal sites.

But we are a provider owned site so we fall under the community employment category.

And we do a lot to provide more intensive one to one support in our community employment program.

So we have vocational specialists assigned to each of the sites and even though each provider's community

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employment program looks a little bit different I would say the level of support is always higher in a community employment program.

Knowing that with some up front intensive supports, people are oftentimes are then ready to move back into supportive employment in a competitive environment or to move there for the first time.

So when is this a good fit?

I'd say we oftentimes will get referrals from VRS when people have tried competitive employment multiple times or have tried multiple jobs and it just isn't a fit and the participant and VR is feeling like just some additional supports up front might help that person be successful moving into their goals.

I know on our end on a programmatic end we see a lot of people coming out of the hospital who will just call us because they've heard about us through word of mouth and just want to start employment with us, given their history of job loss in the community so we'll get them started in our community employment program with the intent that we're helping them move towards competitive and integrated employment.

So an example of what this can look like and the transition from community to supported, I know that we had a participant who came to us, he did come to us from the hospital, he came with a diagnosis of severe and persistent mental illness.

He also had chemical health addiction and had not been able to keep a job longer than a couple of months.

And he really said his goal was to find stable employment.

So he started in our janitorial program and has worked boat at our county site and federal sites but most recently moved into a warehouse job where he's now working full time and is also making \$24 an hour.

So his ultimate goal was to get back into a warehouse environment eventually and we were really privileged to get to sort of be a part of that process.

So he was with us for our CE program, he's now moved into supported employment where we're also working to make sure that this job is a fit long-term and to provide those wraparound supports.

And I will turn it back over, Janeen, if you can flip the next slide.

>> Hello, my name is Nate Lotton, director of employment services at MRCI.
So with EE is voluntary service based on an individual's needs for support services in order to

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maintain, retain, and advance in their employment.
So the services can really last as long as somebody wants them.

And then we do annual assessments of the needs and goals.

So oftentimes we are working with individuals for several years and their goals change whether they want to, you know, take a different position within their employer, you know, we've worked with some people that have started off as like working the grocery store doing carts and now they're cashiering.

So we're able to with EE funds be able to go in there and help them grow in their employment.

So for eligibility for EE, there needs to be a documentation of a diagnosed disability by a qualified professional.

And then documentation of three or more functional limitations.

Just a couple that like communication and personal skills, work tolerance, so those areas that they can be assessed in.

Then the individual cannot receive waiver funding.
Next slide.

So EE should be discussed at PBA intake.

And then EE employment services can begin as soon as someone starts a job.

So really if they're in a PBA in that second milestone of when they've successfully been hired at that employer.

And then individuals can be referred outside of an open file with VRS as well.

So we can work with individuals that aren't currently open through VRS but we've had employers ask us questions about, you know, can we refer other employees that we have working for us for you guys to come in and help, so.

Next slide, please.

Requirements for EE, we're required to meet at least twice per month, so that's at minimum.

We often are meeting more than that, just to ensure that the job is going well.

And then that doesn't include check-ins that we do with the employer if the client or individual is not with us.

So these are just two visits with that individual receiving the EE service.

We need to receive copies of their paystubs and then we also work, they work with provider to develop an annual

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support plan like I said we go through on an annual basis, see what's going well, what's not going well, how they prefer supports to be provided to them and then cover their goals again.

VRS PBA and PT contracts, so there is not a funding conflict with any of the PBA milestones like I mentioned earlier or any other VRS approved services. Both EE and contracted VRS services can be provided at the same time.

And with an intake fee, so if it is a new referral then we would be doing a intake fee.

But if an individual is already working with like a PBA, then we wouldn't ask for that intake fee.

And I will hand it over to Jackie.

>> Jackie: Hi, everyone, my name is Jackie Siepker, I supervise Hennepin County vocational services program. And I'm going to talk about some of successes that people experienced through Extended Employment. Those of you who are vocational counselors, you may recommend and refer individuals for Extended Employment but you don't always get the chance to hear people's experiences with the program after those initial 90 days.

So here are a couple of experiences from Extended Employment participants highlighting how EE has helped them.

The names of the participants have been changed and identifying information has been excluded to help maintain their privacy.

Julie began working with an extended employment provider to give her additional supports to accommodate her learning disability and her anxiety.

Julie reports that EE has been a phenomenal help at providing support needed to manage her anxiety by giving her someone to talk about work concerns as they come up.

Julie also found it helpful to have support around her learning and language disability.

She reports that without EE she does not believe she would have had the same opportunities for raises and bonuses she has been afforded in the job.

Next slide.

Kevin began working with an Extended Employment provider after being referred by his addiction treatment program.

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Kevin began working as a vet tech after completing the training for his field.

Kevin worked with his EE provider to establish goals of keeping his job, learning task tasks required of him including tasks on the computer which was a struggle for him, and to sustain his physical and mental health. Kevin met with his EE provider on an ongoing basis and over the course of a year and a half, Kevin utilized supports to develop strategies tomorrow learning his tasks on the computer and increase -- competence on the computer.

They worked to managing work flow and navigating conflicts with coworkers and supervisors as they came up periodically.

Kevin was able to move to working full time in his position and has increased his self-sufficiency and maintained employment for two years after experiencing years of struggles with retaining employment.

His stability in employment has also had a positive impact on his sobriety and he is doing well at work and in his mental and personal health.

So I'm going to pass it to Nate.

>> Nate: Yeah, this slide here is resources for VR staff to be able to go in and look for more details of the Extended Employment and kind of what providers able to provide as well as when you can refer somebody to the EE.

>> Janeen: A big thank you to all of our -- I'm so sorry, I'm trying to spotlight myself at the same time. That doesn't seem to be working today.

A big thank you to all of our Extended Employment community partners who helped present today. They were invited specifically to really share more about EE, both for new VRS staff, for new community partner staff who could make referrals as well. Again, individuals do not need to be referred through Vocational Rehab Services. This is an amazing program that the state of Minnesota has that offers long-term supports to any Minnesotan with a disability that meets these eligibility requirements.

And so there's, you know, just feel free to refer anyone on your caseload or in your personal life,

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professional network, et cetera, who would benefit from knowing about Extended Employment.

We really wanted to highlight this excellent program

and, again, the workgroup of many of our 27 community partners that provide Extended Employment is just a fantastic group of individuals who come together and really build great resources and problem solve any sorts of challenges or barriers to really help get the best possible services out to people so that they can keep their jobs and as the slide said, they can advance in their careers as well.

So again, just a fantastic resource for Minnesotans who don't have access to waiver funding for long-term supports.

Thanks again to everybody for sharing about that today.

Next we are going to talk about contracted services and the request for proposal review workgroup.

I have affectionately named this and everybody seems to like that we call it "Caesar fip wig" [phonetic] because when you put those letters together that's what looks like.

I might occasionally refer to this as the "Caesar fip wig" workgroup.

But this is to look at contracted services and our requests for proposal.

Kind of the history behind this is when we are looking at contracts and contracted services we review those during the months leading up to a new request for proposal.

This is the official invitation to allow us to invite both new partners and existing partners to reapply for contracts with the state of Minnesota Vocational Rehab Services.

So typically we've done that when we're getting ready to post a new request for proposal.

This has been done in the past because it was a convenient time to make changes to those professional technical contracts and to do any updates.

The regional directors and our executive leadership team, which consists of the deputy directors and Dee Torgerson is director, have served as kind of that de facto contracted services and RFP review workgroup and approval body in the past.

So they were kind of the ones that looked over what are we suggesting as changes, et cetera.

This has been effective to some point but it comes with a lot of drawbacks.

First of all, it's a pressurized timeline.

And sometimes if we're waiting, you know, to hear back

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for approval or feedback or that type of thing, it really delays getting the request for proposal posted to our external website and getting those contracts moving so that they're all ready to go on July 1st of that new contracting cycle.

It also has led to a lack of advanced notice and

transparency.

Different conversations can happen in different meetings and therefore we don't always know kind of where the new information has come from or where the suggestion has come from when we're trying to trace it back.

Also, we're missing opportunity to get feedback from all the stakeholders involved.

You know, sometimes we run it past what was the community partner feedback committee, CPC, sometimes we've had a chance to talk to field staff, but not often.

And so we're really missing opportunities to get feedback from everyone.

The purpose of CSRFPWG or the contracted services and RFP review workgroup is that we are going to review all contracted services on an ongoing timeline.

Quarterly a section of contracted services will be reviewed and within a two-year timeline, all contracted services that exist will be actually gone through and reviewed.

This is going to allow time for ample research, solicitation of feedback, and time to review any proposed changes or updates.

The VRS contracted services and RFP -- -- okay. Sorry, somebody muted me accidentally.

It's going to serve to provide a forum for getting input from VRS staff at all levels when we are considering and developing any sort of materials like new invoicing and reporting templates or guidelines, any kind of clarification or updates to our contracted services, definitions and rate setting guidelines.

This workgroup, CSRFPWG will identify and assess -- that are affecting our services.

This is a really great place to start having a consistent, transparent process at how we determine what contracted services are on contracts, how they're working or not working and what rates are being set for them.

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the scope of this workgroup is going to really focus its work on the consideration of issues and factors that affect VR and the contracted services provided through professional technical contracts.

And this, again, is outlined in our request for proposal so we will also do reviews of changes to the request for proposal.

We won't actually do that work, that is contracted -- the contracts and partnerships team work but we will

review it.

For the request for proposal.

We're also really going to focus on the development of better contracted services definitions to be able to utilized both by VR and community partner staff.

What we will not work on are updates to policy and guidance, and we will not actually be in a position of doing contract monitoring and compliance. Again, that is the work of the contracts and partnerships team specialists, rather than this workgroup.

So with this process we're going to have quarterly review cycles.

And what I want to really highlight is the better and more transparent communication timelines. Obviously we're just getting going so the first quarter that we try this will not maybe be the best, but in general in the first quarter we will communicate out both to community partners and to VR what services are going to be discussed or reviewed in the following quarter.

So there will be plenty of time for folks to compile their thoughts about pain points, suggestions, things that would be helpful in terms of templates or technical support. And get that feedback in to the appropriate channels.

During the first six weeks of each quarter, the contracted -- the contracts and partnerships program special program specialists are going to host listening session fours community partners. So our roles will be to really make sure we're providing opportunities for all community partners and including all staff within agencies to share their feedback around the specific contracted services that are being reviewed.

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The workgroup will also work to review existing definitions and what we have posted on our community partner website for billing requirements and potential templates for invoices or reports.

The workgroup members will work to gather feedback from their peers across VRS, so if someone is a VR tech serving on this workgroup, it will be their responsibility to solicit feedback from techs across the state.

We will also do consultations with State Services for

the Blind to allow for better alignment between contracts with our sister agency and we'll have definitely a lot of discussion with our AFS or administrative and fiscal services staff at DEED, as well as the specific policy specialists that can help guide some of our work.

We will also be researching rate-setting guidance from rehab services administration and other sources.

The second six weeks of each quarter are going to include drafting any updates to exist to existing definitions and we're going to have a recommended rate range for future contract and amendment cycles.

Again, removing it out of that pressurized timeline of doing amendments in contracts.

We will be drafting billing guidance and creating sample invoices and reports for each service so that there are better resources for both partners and VR staff to view on our community partner website. We'll be soliciting feedback from various senior leaders within VRS and refining our drafts, and then presenting the final draft to the ELT team, executive leadership, which includes the deputy directors and our director Dee Torgerson, for final approval.

This workgroup is made up of VR staff from a variety of positions and locations across the agency, and members will serve roughly a two-year term.

We might do a little bit of adjusting on those terms initially just to allow for kind of an overlap of existing members and new members.

Invitations have been sent out to the selected members for the inaugural workgroup, and this first group is really going to be helping both myself and VRS as a whole to test and streamline this process so that we can be most effective.

Look for further communication coming out.

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It's really going to be heavily communicated what we're looking at for our first kind of test contracted services, and then also what members are there.

You will always know who to get ahold of to provide feedback, which is really, again, a key part of being a part of this workgroup.

And with that, we have presented all of our information.

Again, you might find the link in chat to be more useful to you than the one in the presentation, but we really welcome your questions about both Extended Employment and then also any of your questions about the contracted services and RFP review workgroup. And I think I'm -- can't talk today -- I'm soliciting

your feedback but I'm also facilitating your questions and answers time.

So I'm going to pop open ...

If you'll just excuse me for one minute, I'm going to quickly find where I can view the responses.

>> Lori: Thank you, Janeen.

And, yes, by all means, please shoot your questions our way and we'll answer those.

So thank you all.

>> Janeen: Lori, I'm going to call this the full moon or Venus is in the microwave or something, forum today because, gosh, I'm just having technical issues today. Okay.

I have a question about EE.

So again I'm going to welcome any of our EE guests to hop on and answer this, or Meghan Hanson, if you want. Can EE start if the person has job coaching?

I'm going to call on Kassia from Tasks.

Sorry, Meghan, not to be --

>> Meghan: That's fine.

>> Janeen: We'll utilize our partners while we have them, right?

>> Meghan: Absolutely.

>> Kassia: Hi, everyone.

So you can start EE when you're in job coaching, that

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still is not considered a duplication of services.

Amanda Jensen-Stahl was sort of my guide on when and how to open people for EE and the one thing that she always really highlighted when I talked to her was that it's not considered a duplication and in fact we really want to start people in extended employment services as early in the process as possible, knowing that those ongoing services really depend on having that relationship built and those outcomes for people keeping jobs for a longer period of time really just go way up when we're able to jump in as soon as possible. So, yes, people can be open for Extended Employment services while they're open for job coaching, knowing that job coaching services will eventually fall off and that Extended Employment services can stay intact as those services, as those VRS job coaching services go away.

>> Janeen: Kassia, I'm going to you have keep you for just a second longer because these are also very similar but I just want to clarify.

So help me understand the interplay with VR funded job coaching and EE.

Who pays for EE?

So EE does not come out of VRS dollars in, you know, case service dollars, that we know, but Kassia, again, if you want to highlight where the EE money comes from.

>> Kassia: Yeah, great question.

Different pool of money.

It is a combo of state and federal dollars and it is a state appropriation.

So our Extended Employment program goes through the legislative process in order to have additional dollars allocated and it is separate from VR dollars.

I will say that VR, I believe, does get a match, so when you prefer people to Extended Employment, it is beneficial for the VR program as well.

>> Janeen: Thanks.

I will let you off the hook.

I appreciate your help today.

>> Kassia: Thank you, everybody.

>> Janeen: This is a better question for Meghan and maybe Lori Thorpe with your experience as a RAM as well.

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The person is asking Extended Employment starts on day one of employment, person has job coaching for three weeks why does VRS 90-day clock start?

--

>> It would be the same as any other time job coaching starts, so 90 days -- and that doesn't change, having Extended Employment involved doesn't change the way you move forward with the PBA or job coaching services.

I want to go back a little bit and this might help answer that and add to what was already said in that when you have both EE and job coaching or you're using EE, you know, to help with the retention of the position, if you have a job coaching service involved along with EE, it's helpful to make sure you're kind of demonstrating the difference between the two services. So even if you're using the same staff person or if in the case that you have an EE provider coming in to help go with the ongoing supports once you're no longer going to be involved, just making sure you're demonstrating through case notes and just what service you're offering when you are supporting that person, so

that can help determine that 90-day clock too.
I don't know if there's anything you want to add as
having been a RAM.

>> Lori: No, I don't think so, so thank you.

>> Janeen: Excellent.

Thank you both.

And, Meghan, this is going to be a question kind of
specifically about the EE program.

Are Extended Employment found still only available to
non-profits?

If so, are there any plans to change this requirement?

That has to do with opening it up to new providers
potentially, would we ever change the requirement that
you have to be a non-profit?

>> Meghan: Well, all of the requirements for Extended
Employment are specifically written through the state
statute and so it would take some work with the state
legislature to make changes to that.

As for opening to new providers it would be considered
an expansion of the program to open up to more
dollars and putting out an RFP type of process out
there.

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>> Janeen: Okay.

So now a question about the new process at VR for the
contracted services.

How do VRS staff get on CSRFPWG or were they already
selected?

Would love to be able to to be a part of this.

I love the enthusiasm and I appreciate it.

What we had decided for the inaugural workgroup is that
because this is a new process for both soliciting and
kind of working through feedback and then also some
intensive research and that sort of thing, with the
guidance.

regional directors and RAMs and other leaders, we
have selected a workgroup this time around rather than
having open applications.

That may change in the future, but, again, when you're
launching a new kind of project , a way of kind of
setting some clear parameters and boundaries around
feedback timelines and processes, we kind of made it --
needed just to go with a selected group.

Based on looking at different geographical
perspectives, different position perspectives, both new
and seasoned staff, et cetera.

To kind of get the fullest compilation of minds
together that we could.

But, again, I love the enthusiasm and whoever sent that message in, if you want to e-mail me on the side, it's not to say that there won't be small projects within the workgroup with that we couldn't always use extra hands on.

So I do appreciate the enthusiasm.

How are vendors selected for the workgroup, could you share what type of representation will be there for CRPs?

So our partners are going to be doing listening sessions with the professional and technical program specialists here at VRS.

Those will be at the beginning of a review quarter every single time and they are open access to all community partners to provide their feedback.

In addition, if you have specific stats or information that you want to share, please e-mail those either to myself or to your contract liaison, and that feedback is going to be considered as well.

So, again, you kind of have open access both through listening sessions posted and hosted with plenty of lead time so you know what's coming up and then also

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you always have the option to e-mail or reach out with your thoughts about the contracted services at hand, whatever we're discussing that quarter.

Which -- what programs are you going to start with? I'd really like to see you start with PBA rates.

I get that.

I would love to start with PBA rates as well.

That being said, that will be a huge project, and this is a brand new workgroup learning a brand new process.

So we plan to take it easy the first quarter because what we are going to be doing is defining how to do this work.

And working out a lot of the bugs.

And that's really what this first quarter of this new workgroup is going to be about.

So a little bit of patience, but PBA is high on my list of priorities for review and research.

Okay.

And suggestions for the future, I think we will pass those onto the appropriate -- O., one more question has come in.

To clarify, no CRPs will be on the workgroup, only VRS staff?

Yes, because this is an internal process related to our contracts and our requests for proposal.

It would be a conflict of interest to have someone who

is going to be a potential contracted partner or is one to be on this side of the work.

But like I said, we're going to really have I think better and improved communication and opportunities for partners to give feedback about contracted services.

So I hope there's a little bit of trust there that we will actually be expanding access to talk about contracted services and that each contracted service will be looked at within a two-year cycle so there's never anything that's hanging out for a lot of years without any updates.

>> Lori: Janeen, this is Lori, if I can add to this too.

I know that you're all aware that we did sunset gently the community partner committee that had been going on for over a decade and it served such an important and vital purpose.

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And what we're going to do instead, because we want to involve more of our partners and not just those select few that were part of the CPC, we are going to starting later this fall and more information will be coming on this, but we're going to get back to having in-person meetings with VRS staff and our partner, our partner leaders.

And so we're planning to start it later this fall.

We're looking at doing six regional meetings, so northeast Minnesota, northwest Minnesota, the metro, we'll do one or two in the metro and then southeast and southwest Minnesota where the CP team will be invited from VRS and also VRS managers and leaders will be at those meetings and we'll open it up to leaders from our partners and our LUVs where we'd like to come together again like we used to prior to covid and really catch up with one another.

We'd love to hear what's on your mind, we'll enjoy some delicious snacks and coffee, water, and just hang out together.

And so for the ones this fall we're thinking they'll probably be about three hours in length and hopefully as many of our VR staff and partners can join us as possible to get that rolling again.

We've really missed meeting with you in-person and hearing your concerns, your ideas, your innovative thoughts and also receiving updates from VRS about GoMN or E1MN or IPS, kind of those types of updates as well, Workforce One access is being rolled out and so Jess would speak to that and Laura Cheney and that type of thing.

So that's how we really want to, we want to get back to the good old days, we really miss seeing you in-person

and getting to know you and developing those deeper relationships.

So more to come on that very soon.

We're trying to secure locations right now.

But coming soon and I hope that a lot of you can be there.

So thank you for that, Janeen.

>> Janeen: Yeah, thanks, Lori.

One last comment that I think might impact both partners and staff, so I'm going to go ahead and read it.

I reconsidered.

It would have been helpful to have had some communication from leadership about any changes that might have occurred had there been a federal government shutdown.

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Since most VRS funds are federal it would have been good to know if there were contingency plans in place.

And we have a response from --

>> Lori: I'll take it, Janeen.

>> Janeen: Okay, we do have a written response from Michelle Basham, do you want me to share?

>> Lori: Yeah, that sounds good.

Perfect.

>> Janeen: Okay.

As we know, yesterday, we learned there's an agreement to extend the budget for 45 days so that's been reached in Congress.

If at any point in the 45 days or beyond an agreement is not reached and a shutdown occurs, DEED and VRS will communicate with our partners regarding the impact --

[audio and video froze]

>> Lori: I see Janeen is frozen so let me pull up that verbiage.

Let's see.

Yes, so as Janeen was saying, if at any point in the 45 days during this extension, an agreement is not reached, DEED and VRS will communicate with our partners regarding the impact of the shutdown to our work.

And just so you know, yeah, that will -- you're right, that hadn't been communicated out but going forward we'll be sure to communicate that type of information out to our partners, so thank you for that comment.

>> Janeen: And I think that looks like it's it for today, Lori.

Can everyone hear me?

>> Lori: Yes, Janeen, we can hear you.

>> Janeen: Okay, my internet is unstable as am I today apparently.

>> Lori: There are on those days.

>> Janeen: Yes.

I do not see any further conversation or questions coming in, so thank you to everyone for attending. And I'll kick it back over to Lori to say goodbye.

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>> Lori: Yes, wonderful.

And just one thing I'll add and you probably all know this is happening, but all of our PT contracts are set to expire on June 30th of next year, which it may seem far away but it's coming quick, you guys.

And so just to know that we will be putting out early in 2024 we'll be putting out the request for -- to renew all those contracts and get that process running, so.

More to come on that as well, so.

Good.

Anything else to be added before we -- no?

Well, hearing none, it was just wonderful to see all of you.

I love when you have your cameras on, it's so fun to see your faces and I look forward to our continued work together and to the future.

And thank you for being part of this larger VR community.

I really appreciate all your work --

[recording stopped]

>> Lori: So thank you!

Take care.

>> Janeen: Thank you to all of our interpreters today, our closed captionist.

We really, really appreciate you.

And thank you again to the EE workgroup folks.

It was all kind of last-minute and happen hazard but you really rolled with it, so I appreciate you.

>> Lori: Thank you all.

Please take care.

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