

Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation Progressive Employment (Rapid Engagement) Model Replication and Evaluation Report



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Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation Progressive Employment Model Replication and Evaluation Report: Working Paper

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The data, information, and views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the overall findings or outcomes of the ongoing Progressive Employment Model Replication and Evaluation study. This working paper series is meant to provide preliminary information and document the process and impact of the model implementation in various state agencies. These papers will be updated as the research progresses to reflect new data and findings.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	5
1. Introduction	7
1.1 Contents of this Report.....	7
1.2 Overview of the PE Model.....	7
1.3 Background and Context for PE Model Replication	9
1.4 Nebraska VR’s PE Model Implementation Strategies	10
1.5 Key Evaluation Questions	11
1.6 Methods Used to Address Evaluation Questions.....	12
2. Summary of RE Services.....	14
2.1 Clients Served.....	14
2.2 RE Activities	14
3. Impact on Service-Related Outcomes.....	16
3.1 Case flow	16
3.2 Case Cost.....	17
3.3 Business Relations	18
4. Impact on Employment Outcomes.....	20
4.1 Successful Rehabilitation Outcomes.....	20
5. Nebraska VR Staff Experiences with RE	21
6. Discussion and Implications.....	23
7. Additional Observations and Recommendations	26
Appendices.....	29

Tables

Table 1. PE fidelity components	9
Table 2. Model components and implementation strategies	11
Table 3. RE: Total number of services provided	15
Table 4. Statewide number and percent of RE / total cases over time by adult and youth.....	16
Table 5. Median days from application to first RE experience.....	16
Table 6. Comparison of unsuccessful early dropout rates for RE vs. non-RE for closed cases only (successfully closed + terminated) from case file data.....	17
Table 7. Average case costs by team for RE and non-RE adults and youth.....	17
Table 8. Number and percent of RE youth and adult by BAM region.....	19
Table 9. Comparison of outcomes for RE vs. non-RE (traditional comparison).....	20
Table 10. Comparison of outcomes for RE vs. non-RE (non-traditional comparison*)	20
Table 11. Frequency of responses: Usefulness of RE model components in daily work (N=55)	21
Table 12. RE model impact on work (N=53).....	22
Table 13. Frequency of responses: RE as a model for service delivery (N=54)	22
Table 14. Frequency of responses: RE as a model for service delivery, continued.....	22
Table 15. Priority category distribution of cases.....	25
Table 16. Statewide VR client satisfaction survey comparison 2015-2016 Q1	27
Table 17. Demographic information of RE and non-RE youth and adults.....	29
Table 18. VR case details and closure information.....	30
Table 19. Case status and flow outcomes	30
Table 20. Characteristics of clients referred to RE	31

Figures

Figure 1. RE: Total number of services provided	14
Figure 2. Cases by BAM region.....	18
Figure 3. Priority category distribution for RE and non-RE cases	25



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2015, the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston launched the *Vermont Progressive Employment (PE) Model Replication and Evaluation* study (NIDILRR Grant #H133B120002). Co-facilitated by the ICI and Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the project recruited four state VR agencies that would adopt and study the PE model. The participating states received training and technical assistance, adapted the model to their states, implemented the key components, and started serving jobseekers and businesses. Nebraska VR (NVR) was an early adopter of the PE model, and joined the Learning Collaborative in March 2015 after having agreed to serve as a “beta test” site for PE model replication in Fall 2014.

NVR was in the process of expanding their own service model that was in many respects parallel to PE; however, the nomenclature for Nebraska’s model is unique – “Rapid Engagement” (RE) replaces Progressive Employment. The Lincoln office began piloting this RE approach in September 2014, and state-wide implementation occurred in July 2015. Several new business account managers, or BAMs, were hired to support PE state-wide.. NVR is similar in their approach to VT DVR by intention and design.

The NVR approach parallels VT DVR approach in several ways:

- Focus on employers and businesses¹ as partners (dual customer model).
- Early engagement – NVR is highly focused on “Rapid Engagement” as a tool for exposing clients to job opportunities and client focused career selections very early in the VR process.
- Jobsville meetings – The types and levels of staff communication during team meetings parallel the intent of VT Jobsville meetings (WIN meetings).
- BAMs – NE hired several BAMs whose primary focus is business. As in VT, they do not carry a client caseload, and their focus is developing new business contacts and client placement opportunities.
- Mechanisms for covering wages, stipends, liability, and worker compensation are in place.
- The percentage of overall agency clientele served by RE in Nebraska is roughly similar to persons receiving PE in VT DVR.

Since July 2015, RE services in NVR have been recorded for 247 youth and 453 adult VR clients. This represents 10% of youth and 6.4% of adults who became VR clients during this time. The demographics of persons who receive RE services are similar to the general VR population; however, RE recipients tend to be less educated and have slightly higher enrollment in Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance. They are less likely to

¹ We acknowledge the differences between the terms “business” and “employer”, and have attempted to shift toward the use of “business” as the default terminology to describe what might be a *potential* employer. This report uses both terms, as the accepted nomenclature is shifting in the field.

be employed at VR application, and represent a higher percentage of diagnoses of most significant disabilities, mental illness, and intellectual disability.

According to staff survey results, the highest percentages of reasons why clients are referred to RE are “little or no work history” (49%), “stuck cases” (40%), “client’s stated interest in obtaining work experience” (38%), and “soft skills or behavioral issues” (33%).

The specific business exposure options differ somewhat in frequency from adults to youth, but these options include on-the-job evaluation (OJE), on-the-job training (OJT), job shadow, informational interview, business tours, and mock interviews. The majority of business exposures for youth and adults tend to be “high-dose” exposures, meaning that the experience lasts more than one day.

NVR has a larger than usual group of employees who focus on vocational evaluation, and these individuals appear to be using RE as a means for planning rehabilitation services. Consequently, the most common work exposure option for youth and adults is OJE. As a result, the duration of time from application to IPE is longer for RE than non-RE clients (especially for youth), because nearly half of RE clients are gaining business exposures prior to their IPE.

Since July 2015, data indicate that approximately 69.6% of RE youth cases are still open, compared with 58.8% of non-RE youth. RE adults are still open in 57% of cases, compared with 37.8% of non-RE adults. This closure differential suggests that the success rates for RE will grow somewhat larger compared to non-RE over time.

We used a different metric for comparing overall success, one that reflects how Congress looks at employment rates for persons with disabilities. We compared the success rate against ALL closures, even those occurring prior to plan [(successful closures / (successful closures + terminated cases))].

When comparing the overall success rate of RE vs non-RE among closed cases, there is a pattern of more successful closures in RE (RE youth = 32% success vs non-RE youth = 18%; RE adults = 45.1% vs non-RE adults = 33.6%). One reason for this large differential in success is the lower number of clients in RE who drop out of VR prior to IPE compared with non-RE. This report also compares success rates of RE vs non-RE using the convention reported to RSA (only terminations after plan included).

Costs associated with RE service delivery were compared with non-RE case costs based on data taken from case files shared with ICI. In most cases, the median costs of RE are higher than for non-RE. Additional dialogue and analysis will be necessary to sort out and clarify case cost information.

Business contact activities expanded considerably since the start of RE. The business database nearly doubled to 2,036 specific business contacts in less than two years. It is not known how many of these contacts have actually been used to date for RE or other client services.



1. INTRODUCTION

In January 2015, the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston issued a Request for Participation (RFP) for state vocational rehabilitation agencies to join the *Vermont Progressive Employment Model Replication and Evaluation* study. Housed under the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Demand-Side Strategies (NIDILRR Grant #H133B120002) at the ICI, the study was designed to include a Learning Collaborative co-facilitated by the ICI and Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation of four state VR agencies that would adopt and study the PE model.

The participating states received training and technical assistance, adapted the model to their states, implemented the key components, and started serving job seekers and businesses. Nebraska VR was an early adopter of the PE model, and joined the Learning Collaborative in March 2015 after having agreed to serve as a “beta test” site for PE model replication in Fall 2014.

1.1 Contents of this Report

Section 1 of this report gives an overview of the PE model components, and all aspects of the replication and evaluation study. Section 2 provides a summary of RE services delivered. First, we describe the demographic and case profile of individuals in RE, and then we provide an overview of the RE services provided to this group. Section 3 includes a description of Nebraska VR staff experience using the RE model. Section 4 provides the results of the impact analysis on service-related outcomes and Section 5 discusses the impact on employment outcomes. Sections 6 and 7 provide discussion points and implications of the evaluation findings, as well as additional observations and recommendations.

1.2 Overview of the PE Model

The Progressive Employment (PE) model is an innovative, dual-customer practice emerging out of Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). This model has demonstrated strong success at Vermont DVR in a five-year evaluation, with PE participants experiencing successful rehabilitation closure rates approximately 10% higher than the average for other DVR consumers. At its core, PE uses work-based learning strategies to meet the needs of both the business and the job seeker with a disability while minimizing the risks for both parties. Elements of the model include early consumer engagement in work environments (everyone is ready for something), a strong team approach, and VR-provided short-term liability insurance and training offset compensation for consumers.

The key components of the PE model are listed here, organized by Business, Customer, and Team Components. PE is implemented as a team approach with the job seeker, counselor, employment specialist, and business relations or account manager as core team members. Business account managers have a “caseload” of businesses and have unique roles including developing business contacts, becoming very familiar with the local economy, and acting as a resource for local businesses.

BUSINESS FOCUSED COMPONENTS:

- Creating a “business as customer” delivery system: Engagement with businesses is characterized as a sales approach that seeks to serve the business’s current and future employment needs.
- Business risk reduction options that include liability and worker’s compensation coverage for businesses and sources for stipends for trainees’ time.
- Business tracking database: An ever-expanding business database is maintained that includes business specifics, and their levels of availability for providing work experiences.

CUSTOMER FOCUSED COMPONENTS:

- Adoption of the “everybody is ready for something” approach: Work experiences boost confidence, increase motivation to complete VR, and introduce businesses to potential future employees. Early work experiences provide vocational evaluation information while increasing motivation for consumers.
- Full array of work experiences: These include low and high dose strategies such as job tours, mock interviews by businesses through to 6-week work experiences and internships.
- Focus on jobseekers with intensive pre-work needs such as those with multiple significant disabilities, criminal justice involvement, behavioral disabilities, and poor work histories.
- Rapid engagement in real-life work settings with a reduction of “job readiness” assessments and evaluations.

TEAM-FOCUSED COMPONENTS:

- A team approach to service delivery that includes the job seeker, business, counselor, employment specialist, and a business account manager. The employment specialist has greater autonomy than usual in creating work experiences based on consumer interests. The employment team meets weekly or biweekly through live meetings or teleconferences depending on the rural nature of the territory covered.
- Rapid communication of labor market intelligence in which all teams share information across job seekers and businesses for the express purpose of identifying matches and opportunities.
- Disaggregation of rehabilitation caseload dollars from work experience placements: In states such as VT where funds are allocated to specific VR counselors, there are separate funds for PE so that necessary rehabilitation services do not compete for dollars with early work experience placements.

The Demand-Side RRTC spent time in the first two years defining PE in order to create a working model that could be transported beyond Vermont. Considering the number of VR and state-specific factors that might impact delivery of PE (e.g., work experience reimbursement policies, use of community rehabilitation providers, local labor market dynamics, VR counselor caseloads and funding levels, staffing ratios, and minimum wage regulations), the RRTC project team constructed the following beta version of a fidelity tool to guide the pilot efforts.

Table 1. PE fidelity components

Component	Fidelity elements
Dual customer design	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employment staff negotiate directly with businesses to implement work-based learning experiences 2. Regular contact between employment staff and businesses participating in PE 3. Business account manager role focuses on business outreach, not VR caseload
Team approach with emphasis on rapid engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Jobsville or equivalent regular team meetings focused on communication and coordination between employment staff and VR counselors 5. Entire team credit for successful rehab closure 6. Consumers meet with employment specialists close to time of IPE signing 7. Several, very specific work experience or related consumer options
Focus on high-risk or difficult-to-place consumers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Option for consumers with high risk for employment failure due to lack of work history, criminal history, mental illness, multiple disabilities, or co-existing risk factors
Mechanism for set-asides or training offset funds	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Funds for PE training offset separate from VR counselor case management funds, so that funds do not compete with other VR needs
Liability and workers' compensation insurance for trainees	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. Mechanism for providing liability and worker comp for trainees in lieu of employer need to provide the same, or equivalent method of liability coverage
Data tracking tools for PE	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Consumer RSA-911 case services linked at client level with PE data forms 12. Continuously updated local business database regularly used by PE team

1.3 Background and Context for PE Model Replication

OVERVIEW OF NEBRASKA VR

Nebraska VR is a general VR agency serving over 6000 clients per year, with approximately 2000 job seekers entering the work force every year. Services are available via 10 area offices, with approximately 213 total staff. Among specialized staff 73% are VR counselors and Pre-Employment Transition Services, 23% are placement, 14% evaluators, and 3% are independent living. This is an approximation, as a number of staff wear multiple hats.

Nebraska VR provides the majority of VR services in-house, using community rehabilitation providers for some service provision (e.g., benefits analysis and supported employment). The largest client population distribution centers on the eastern part of the state, with the western half of the state being very rural and relatively unpopulated. The reported rehabilitation rate at the time we initiated the PE replication in 2015 was above 65%, making it one of the more successful VR programs in the country.

IMPETUS FOR PE MODEL ADOPTION

In a preliminary discussion between NVR, VT DVR, and ICI in early 2014, the basic components of the Progressive Employment (PE) model were discussed. NE was doing similar business-focused activities, or the plans were in place to initiate them. One aspect of the PE model that NE wished to emulate was the dual customer model. NE began hiring business account managers (BAMs), with the plan of having one BAM position per region in the state. Currently there are four BAMs in the state who are geographically dispersed in the eastern (most populated) side of the state.

NVR has a strong vocational evaluation component, with over a dozen staff with this primary job role. Vocational evaluators were initially concerned that the amount of OJE they conducted was contrary to the PE model; however, Hugh Bradshaw from VT DVR thought that the use of OJE in NE was comparable to the work experience component of PE in VT. In the end, it was the vocational evaluation staff who took advantage of PE-type employment exposures to gather very pertinent data on client rehabilitation needs.

After continued discussion about the target clientele for the new approach it was decided that any VR applicant who appeared to qualify for services would be potentially eligible for this approach. Once PE case cost data from VT were shared with NE in February 2014, NVR agreed to be involved with the project, and trainings were planned and conducted for their staff by VT and ICI personnel. Subsequently, NVR agreed to join a cohort of three other states replicating PE, rather than remaining a beta site as was originally proposed. This decision was based on timing of the overall project, the potential for a large number of participants in PE, and the alignment of NVR's services and philosophy (including the RE approach) with the PE model.

There were several advantages for replication of PE in Nebraska, including NVR being an innovative program that embraces change and continuous quality improvement. Their philosophical approach to VR service delivery was similar to VT DVR, especially related to business relations, early engagement, and team-based services. Their staff appear to be very supportive of changes and in fact desire to move in the proposed directions—they seem to be used to change and embrace it. Additionally, a field office supervisor characterized the current counselor and employment specialist paperwork burden as “light,” and documentation of some additional data fields would be acceptable to field staff in light of program changes already underway.

NVR is unusual in the number of agency staff dedicated to the vocational evaluation function. This factor appears to have had an impact on how PE might be used in the state, especially in regard to the overall percentage of work exposures that might be used early in the process for vocational evaluation purposes.

TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR MODEL IMPLEMENTATION

The ICI and Vermont DVR staff provided training and technical assistance, including in-person and web/teleconference meetings to Nebraska VR staff. PE model training, TA, and research staff were available for on-demand TA (email, phone) throughout the model implementation. Additionally, Dennis Moore contributed to the NVR monthly internal newsletter on PE-specific topics pertinent to the field, which supported staff understanding and application of the PE model.

PEER-TO-PEER LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

The ICI and Vermont DVR hosted the PE Learning Collaborative to facilitate cross-state partnership in PE model replication, implementation, and evaluation. The LC also served as a resource for PE implementation sites for PE materials (written briefs) and other learning objects (videos). As an off-shoot of the PE Learning Collaborative, the ICI also hosted a community of practice for job developers across states to discuss implementation strategies and challenges for topics related to job development and business relations. State agency VR staff and community rehabilitation providers attended a series of web-based conferences to exchange ideas. Nebraska VR was an active participant in both the cross-state LC and the job development community of practice. *(See Appendix 3 for a more detailed description of the Learning Collaborative.)*

1.4 Nebraska VR's PE Model Implementation Strategies

A new approach in NVR that was being introduced when they enrolled in the PE replication study and learning collaborative is called “Meet You Where You Are.” Within this rubric, staff are encouraged to offer early, client-centered services using a range of options. One option is that a job seeker can elect to go into the “Rapid Engagement” (RE) component, which is strongly akin to VT's Progressive Employment model. The Lincoln office began piloting this RE approach in September 2014, and state-wide implementation started in July 2015 once initial data were available, several BAMs were hired, and state-wide trainings could be accomplished.

Table 2. Model components and implementation strategies

PE Component	Fidelity Elements of PE	NVR Rapid Engagement Implementation Strategy
Dual customer design	Employment staff negotiate directly with businesses	BAM theoretically has first contact with new businesses, then employment specialists do majority of contact with businesses.
	Regular contact between employment staff and businesses participating in PE	Insufficient data to quantify, but staff report regular contact with businesses. OJE sites include some well-established and regularly used business locations.
	Business Account Manager role focuses on business outreach, not VR caseload	Four BAMs represent most populated regions in the eastern part of the state. BAMs do not carry caseload.
PE team approach with emphasis on rapid engagement	Jobsville or equivalent regular team meetings focused on communication and coordination between employment staff and VR counselors	“WIN” meetings follow Jobsville, format and staff are expected to attend. Lincoln has 2 meetings per week due to overall caseload. Staff elect which meeting to attend based on specific agenda and client list.
	Entire team credit for successful rehab closure	This is the NE philosophy but credit goes to VRC in their database. Strong teamwork evident in WIN meetings observed. Staff share roles, often regardless of staff job description.
	Consumers meet with employment specialists close to time of IPE signing	Approximately 1/3 of RE employment exposures are prior to IPE. Often very short time from Application to first RE.
	Several, very specific work experience or related consumer options	RE Activities include company tours, informational interviews, job shadows, mock interviews, OJE, and OJT.
Focus on high risk or difficult to place consumers	Option for consumers with high risk for employment failure due to lack of work history, criminal justice, mental illness, multiple disabilities, or co-existing risk factors	NE is not differentiating anyone as “high-risk,” and RE is available to all clients. Note: at the time of this report, approximately 7.5% of NVR clients received RE services.
Mechanism for set-asides or training offset funds	Funds for PE training offset separate from VR counselor case management funds, so that funds do not “compete” with other perceived VR needs	Funding is not issue, and most funds are pooled and drawn down when needed. Counselors do not have discrete budgets, therefore no issue with spending on VR services vs. job experience. State payroll averages \$7.25/hr for longer RE exposures, categorized as “reimbursement” instead of “stipend.”
Liability and workers’ compensation insurance for trainees	Mechanism for providing liability and worker comp for trainees in lieu of employer need to provide the same, or equivalent method of liability coverage	At beginning of replication NVR obtained liability insurance for consumers in work experience, and Workers Comp covered through state.
Data tracking tools for PE	1. Consumer RSA-911 case services linked at client level with PE data forms	The case management system, QE2, is comprehensive and fluid. Some issues in identifying all RE cases, and especially low dose RE experiences may not be recorded as RE.
	2. Up to date local business database regularly used by PE team	Business data tracking in QE2 was expanded and cleaned of duplicates following hiring of BAMs.

1.5 Key Evaluation Questions

Each of the four PE replication states had an evaluation plan that was jointly drafted by ICI and the administrative VR staff of the state. Although the plans are similar, each was modified to take advantage of existing data collection systems and specific topics of interest to VR administrators. Because of state-to-state variations in services, programs, and policies, there was no attempt to do rigorous cross-state analysis in this phase of study. The following evaluation plan with six hypotheses was finalized for NVR in December 2015, and the results to date are provided in later sections of this report.

- Consumers who participate in rapid engagement work experiences will achieve a higher percentage of successful rehabilitation outcomes compared with consumers who do not participate in rapid engagement over the same time period.
- The agency-wide percent of consumers recorded with rapid engagement work experiences, as defined in the “meet you where you are—rapid engagement” option, will increase over the time of the evaluation period.
- The median duration of time from application to first work experience will decrease over the period of the project.
- The mean number of case services and case costs will be higher for consumers who participate

in rapid engagement than for other VR consumers in the same time period.

- The total number of businesses that provide work experiences to NVR consumers will increase by 20% in the evaluation period.
- The percentage of rapid engagement consumers in specific field offices will vary by regions created by specific BAM territories.

1.6 Methods Used to Address Evaluation Questions

To address the evaluation questions and provide a summary of RE activities in Nebraska VR, we used multiple quantitative and qualitative primary data sources, described below.

Although the study design did not specify a comparison group to measure statistical differences between “RE versus non-RE clients,” we summarized variables provided by NVR for youth and adult cases that did not receive RE services in order to provide some context for reported findings on RE client outcomes. For most analyses, we separated youth and adult cases.

DATA COLLECTION AND DATA SOURCES

Case Data Files

Nebraska VR provided case file data drawn from the management information system QE2. The ICI requested a data query of the case management system for all cases with the application date within the range of PE rollout through April 30, 2017 which included: basic case file data elements (e.g., demographics) for all cases including RE and non-RE, and all RE-specific data for all RE cases. Nebraska VR provided an Excel data file with each containing a single case (representing a single individual) with all personally identifiable information redacted. Each case was represented by a case ID number. Nebraska VR also provided a data extract containing services provided to each case in a separate file. The case file data extract contained 9,609 cases, of which 700 were RE cases and 8,909 were non-RE cases.

Monthly Aggregate Rapid Engagement Summary Reports

ICI was provided approximately 25 monthly summary spreadsheets about RE activities. These spreadsheets were delivered timely, provided cumulative data to date, and were used in the monthly phone conference calls as a source of information on progress of this initiative. The reports were very helpful in generating discussions about numerous aspects of RE service delivery.

Survey of Nebraska VR Staff on Rapid Engagement

Overview. The ICI and NVR implemented a web-based *Rapid Engagement Evaluation Survey* of NVR staff who are responsible for implementing the PE model. The purpose of the survey was to describe NVR staff use of PE and gauge satisfaction with the model.

The survey instrument was reviewed by NVR's PE team and questions were added / edited based on NVR recommendations. Participants were invited to complete the survey through an email with a link to the accessible web-based survey housed in Survey Gizmo. ICI research staff managed the data collection and analysis. The survey was launched and data collection was completed June–July of 2017.

Respondents. A total of 55 NVR staff responded to the survey, for a response rate of 25.8% (213 staff, some of whom probably are not involved with RE). Most respondents were VR counselors (n=22

or 40%) or job placement / employment specialists (n=17 or 31%). Other titles include vocational evaluator, business account manager, administrator / supervisor, or other. Respondents were asked to indicate the number of RE cases they were involved with by selecting a range option. Responses were distributed across the different ranges, indicating a diverse level of involvement in PE cases across respondents.

In-person Fidelity Site Visit

A PE fidelity to model visit was conducted by ICI staff Kelly Haines and Dennis Moore at the end of April 2016, to determine the fit of RE with the Vermont PE model. The draft fidelity instrument consisted of 25 items, and it was created for the purpose of estimating fidelity to model in the PE replication states.

Based on the fidelity visit, monthly phone calls with NVR and ICI, and anecdotal data, it was determined that the RE model fits very closely with PE as developed in VT DVR. Operational practices, as well as process and outcome data, appeared to be consistent from VT to NE in spite of the differences in program nomenclature.

The following areas of RE match PE principles and practices:

- Focus on employers and businesses as partners (dual customer model).
- Early engagement – NVR is highly focused on “Rapid Engagement” as a tool for exposing clients to job opportunities and client focused career selections very early in the VR process.
- Jobsville meetings – The types and levels of staff communication during staffing sessions parallel the intent of VT Jobsville meetings (called “WIN meetings” in NE).
- Business Account Managers (BAMs) – NVR has hired several BAMs whose primary focus is businesses. As in VT, they do not carry a client caseload, and their focus is developing new business contacts and client placement opportunities. The main difference between BAMs in VT and NE is that BAMs in NE are area-based.
- Funds exist to substantially lower the burden for employment sites, such as mechanisms for covering wages, stipends, liability, and Workers Compensation. NVR reports that they have sufficient resources in house to cover these expenses. Budgets are not assigned to specific VR counselors.
- The percentage of overall agency clientele served by RE in NE is roughly similar to people receiving PE in VT DVR.

Quarterly/Monthly Conference Calls

Monthly conference calls were held between NVR and ICI, with Janet Drudik and Dennis Moore attending the bulk of these calls. These frequent contacts provided an opportunity to refine the model and implementation strategies, and to discuss training needs and areas of concern. The calls were also helpful in providing a larger context to ICI regarding the overall philosophy of NVR, as well as understanding other initiatives that were also in effect at the same time at the agency.

Additional Documents / PE Materials Review

In keeping with the materials available on PE in VT, several brochures and other informational media were developed in NE to assist their clients, as well as potential employers, in understanding the benefits of the VR program. These materials are high quality, and they have already been shared with several other VR programs across the country.

2. SUMMARY OF RE SERVICES

2.1 Clients Served

The official state-wide start of RE occurred in July 2015. Approximately 700 VR consumers were recorded as receiving some service within RE from that time to June 2017.

Although the criteria for recruitment into RE may differ from that of PE in VT DVR, there are a number of similarities in participant demographics across the two state VR programs. In particular, the percentage of NVR RE participants employed at application was lower than non-RE clients, and NVR RE participants had higher percentages receiving Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance. The primary disability of NVR RE participants is similar to the demographic trends for PE in VT DVR with the highest percentages of participants with mental health or intellectual disabilities diagnoses. Table 18 in the Appendices describes demographic and descriptive data on RE and non-RE participants.

Generally speaking, the demographics of clients referred into RE match the non-PE VR population. However, there are indications that the RE cohort has less successful job experience, or they have somewhat greater barriers to vocational success.

2.2 RE Activities

NVR has a number of staff positions dedicated either full or part time to vocational evaluation. There was some concern at the start of this project about how these staff would interface with a PE-type model of early intervention; however, the staff appear to have not only endorsed the model but have expanded it to include significant work exposures for the purpose of on-the-job evaluation (OJE). In fact, this work exposure service type is the most common for both adults and youth going into RE. Similar to VT DVR, work exposures tend to involve more high-dose than low-dose exposures, where a low dose is any exposure lasting no more than one day. Figure 1 and Table 4 below details the RE experiences for adults and youth.

Figure 1. RE Experiences: Total Number of Services Provided

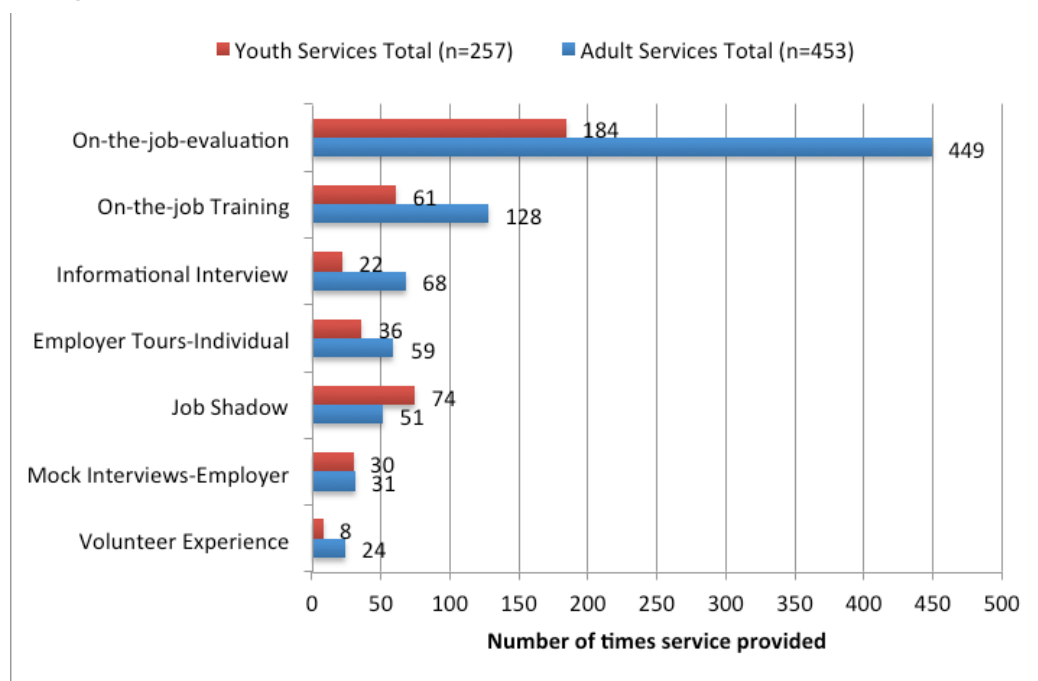


Table 3. RE experiences: Total number of services provided

Adult RE experiences	Services Total	Youth RE experiences	Services Total
Employer Tours-Group	0	Employer Tours-Group	0
Employer Tours-Individual	59	Employer Tours-Individual	36
Informational Interview	68	Informational Interview	22
Job Shadow	51	Job Shadow	74
Mock Interviews-Employer	31	Mock Interviews-Employer	30
On-the-job Training	128	On-the-job Training	61
On-the-job-evaluation	449	On-the-job-evaluation	184
Volunteer Experience	24	Volunteer Experience	8
Total Adult	810	Total Youth	415

Adult

High dose = 601 Low dose = 209
 74.2% high dose – 25.8% low dose

Youth

High dose = 253 Low dose = 162
 61.0% high dose – 39.0% low dose

High dose = experience lasting more than one day (OJT, OJE, volunteer)

Low dose = experience lasting one day or less (tour, interview, job shadow)

High/Low dose ratio for adults similar to VT DVR percentage

**Note: some low dose experiences may not have been recorded as an “RE” case although the individual was staffed as RE in a team meeting. A similar phenomenon exists in VT.*

The numbers for NVR reported in the table above also include open cases, so the average RE exposures per job seeker are likely to be somewhat higher in the future.

3. IMPACT ON SERVICE-RELATED OUTCOMES

3.1 Case Flow

The agency-wide percent of consumers recorded with rapid engagement work experiences, as defined in the “meet you where you are—rapid engagement” option, will increase over the time of the evaluation period.

Table 4. Statewide number and percent of RE / total cases over time by adult and youth

Spreadsheet Date	RE adult	RE youth	Non-RE adult	Non-RE youth
12/3/15	33 (2.4%)	21 (2.6%)	1343	785
5/1/16	144 (4.7%)	119 (6.4%)	2944	1754
12/1/16	284 (5.5%)	248 (9.9%)	4879	2254
7/7/17	435 (6.4%)	299 (10%)	6334	2675

From selected monthly reports spaced approximately 6–7 months apart

As demonstrated in the above table, this hypothesis appears to be supported.

The median duration of time from application to first work experience will decrease over the period of the project.

Table 5. Median days from application to first RE experience

Date of Application	RE adult days from application to first RE		RE youth days from application to first RE	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Before 12/31/15	124.9	92.5	197.5	183
1/1/2016–5/31/16	103.2	70	118.5	99.5
6/1/2016–12/31/16	82.1	62	89.6	57
After 1/1/17	48.3	42	31.5	26

According to Table 5, this hypothesis is supported. The times from application to first RE appear to shorten as the project continued. It appears that as the RE option became more frequently used, staff became more practiced at implementing RE more quickly and earlier in the rehabilitation process. Anecdotally, comments by senior staff suggested that the agency trained and dialoged with staff in how they could better use vocational evaluation strategies earlier in the VR process.

Current VR research suggests that early engagement leads to greater success and less drop-out, but some information from NVR is counterintuitive. Specifically, participants in RE tend to experience a much longer median time from eligibility to IPE than non-RE participants. However, unlike most state VR programs, in NE the RE participants are engaged with businesses during the time before the IPE is developed, often in OJE activities. Then experiences and observations of participants, businesses, and VR staff are then used to craft a targeted IPE based on vocational interests and rehabilitation issues identified during the work exposure.

One somewhat unexpected but dramatic effect of RE appears to be the reduction of dropouts prior to IPE, as seen in Table 6 below. The table examines closed cases only (successful + terminated), including terminated cases due to ineligibility.

Table 6. Comparison of unsuccessful early dropout rates for RE vs. non-RE for closed cases only (successfully closed + terminated) from case file data

Rapid Engagement Statistics				Non Rapid Engagement Statistics			
Adult		Youth		Adult		Youth	
Total	Unsuccessful prior to IPE	Total	Unsuccessful prior to IPE	Total	Unsuccessful prior to IPE	Total	Unsuccessful prior to IPE
195	60	75	37	4155	2083	919	618
Unsuccessful % prior to IPE							
30.8%		49.3%		50.1%		67.2%	

All Active cases are excluded; terminated cases due to ineligibility are included.

It might be argued that early engagement with clients is the deciding factor in the above statistics, rather than RE itself. However, two things mitigate this possibility. Over one half of RE employment-related experiences occurred after the IPE was signed. Also, the success of RE does not appear to be related to how closely after application that the first RE experience occurs.

In order to test this, we calculated the Pearson Correlation Coefficient between status of early dropout in RE and time in days from application to first business contact. The result ($R=0.068$, $p=0.268$) indicates minimal correlation between early dropout and days from application to first RE business contact. This suggests that it is the RE experience itself, not the proximity of the experience to the application date, that contributes to successful outcomes for people in RE.

3.2 Case Cost

The mean number of case services and case costs will be higher for consumers who participate in rapid engagement than for other VR consumers in the same time period.

Table 7. Average case costs by team for RE and non-RE adults and youth

	Open Case		Successful Closure		Terminated	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
RE-Youth	969.71	497.00	1969.29	1307.37	354.55	0.00
RE-Adult	1143.53	732.34	1823.76	1196.17	918.30	428.49
Non-RE-Youth	490.14	0.00	1471.16	160.47	71.84	0.00
Non-RE-Adult	776.87	0.00	1896.76	500.51	225.46	0.00

Cost data are somewhat confusing. Based on case services data provided to ICI, average and median successful RE youth costs are higher than non-RE youth. The average costs for RE adults with a successful closure are slightly lower than similar non-RE adults, although the median is higher for RE than non-RE. The RE costs are approximately four times higher for unsuccessfully terminated cases than for non-RE cases. However, median case costs appear substantially higher for RE in all categories compared with non-RE cases. Confusing the issue, the spreadsheets generated specifically for RE ICI phone calls consistently showed lower costs for RE than non-RE for both youth and adults. The expectation has been that RE would cost more than non-RE due to the nature of the model and the somewhat more problematic clientele involved with the RE approach.

One interesting observation is the “00” values under median costs for non-RE participants in the above table. Zeros only occur in median values for some categories of open cases and terminated cases. In Nebraska VR, staff-provided services do not have an associated cost. One explanation for the zero values may be that these cases did not yet receive any cost services (open cases) or

terminated cases that closed before services were provided. Given the longer duration of open cases in RE, as well as the increased number of business exposures, it seems logical that RE would be more costly. This additional cost is hidden somewhat by VR staff providing job placement and business contact services rather than through contractors.

3.3 Business Relations

The total number of employers/businesses that provide work experiences to NVR consumers will increase by 20% in the evaluation period.

One of the goals of NVR was to develop a more robust system of recruiting and recording potential employers willing to provide work experiences. In the latter half of 2015, the business database was cleaned and made more usable for BAMs and other personnel. Because of those changes to the database, business figures after that time were used to calculate the growth of the business database.

The NVR RE spreadsheet from April 2016 indicated that 1,232 businesses were recorded in the database. Approximately 14 months later, the June 2017 spreadsheet recorded 2,036 businesses. This constitutes a 65.3% increase in businesses just in that 14-month period. However, it does not specifically indicate that this larger number of businesses provided work experiences for RE clients. Assuming these numbers are correct, it seems likely that the 20% goal has been exceeded, but no clear evidence is available to rigorously test this assumption at this time.

The percentage of rapid engagement consumers in specific field offices will vary by regions created by specific BAM territories.

Figure 2. Number of Cases in RE by BAM Region

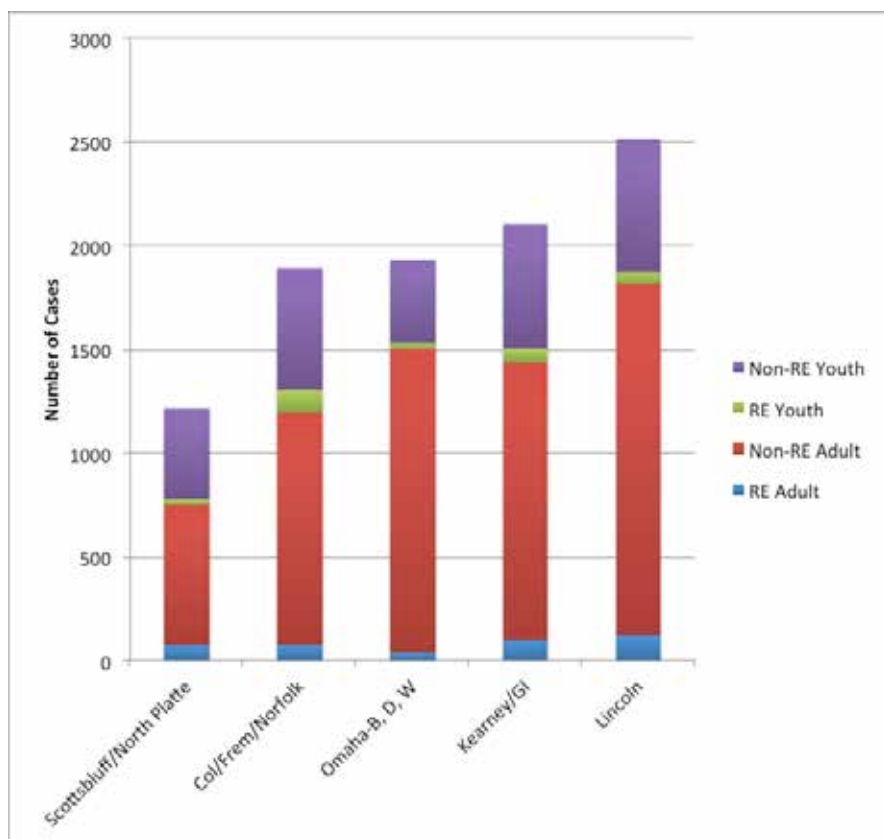


Table 8. Number and percent of RE youth and adult by BAM region

BAM region	Team	RE Adult	RE Youth	Non-RE Adult	Non-RE Youth
No BAM	Scottsbluff/North Platte	72	32	676	437
	No BAM percent	9.6	6.8		
A	Col/Frem/Norfolk	74	109	1120	591
	A percent	6.2	15.6		
B	Omaha-B, D, W	41	25	1462	403
	B percent	2.7	5.8		
C	Kearney/GI	99	70	1339	594
	C percent	6.9	10.5		
D	Lincoln	124	60	1690	638
	D percent	6.8	8.6		

The above chart and table show the variations in frequency of use of RE throughout the state. Scottsbluff/North Platte have the highest percentage of adult RE (9.6%), with Scottsbluff having the highest individual office rate (13.7%) of adults who are in RE. The highest percentage of youth in RE occurs in BAM area A, with 15.6% of youth in RE, and Norfolk has the highest rate of the two offices (16.6%).

After several discussions with NVR staff, it seems likely that factors beyond individual BAMs impact differences in use of RE in an area. A case in point is that the highest adult RE use comes from an area without an official BAM. It is likely that multiple factors influence RE use, and the ICI fidelity review visit noted some factors. We reported that specific roles within the VR team are often shared by staff, regardless of what their specific job title might be. This is seen as a strength of the NVR program, but it makes determinations of factors that influence RE use more difficult.

With the available data, it is difficult to predict with any certainty the impact of BAM regions or BAM personnel on the total clientele recruited into RE by region.

4. IMPACT ON EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

4.1 Successful Rehabilitation Outcomes

Consumers who participate in rapid engagement work experiences will achieve a higher percentage of successful rehabilitation outcomes compared with consumers who do not participate in rapid engagement over the same time period.

Table 9. Comparison of outcomes for RE vs. non-RE (traditional comparison)

Status of participants with IPE		RE(PE)		Total
		no	yes	
Adult	Open case	1531	187	1718
	Successful outcome	1385	88	1473
	Terminated unsuccessful	677	47	724
		3593	322	3915
Youth	Open case	587	83	670
	Successful outcome	161	23	184
	Terminated unsuccessful	136	14	150
		884	120	1004
	RE adult	65.19%		
	Non-RE Adult	67.17%		
	RE Youth	62.16%		
	Non-RE Youth	54.21%		

Table 10. Comparison of outcomes for RE vs. non-RE (non-traditional comparison*)

Status of participants with IPE		RE(PE)		Total
		no	yes	
Adult	Open case	2525	258	2783
	Successful outcome	1395	88	1483
	Terminated unsuccessful	2760	107	2867
		6680	453	7133
Youth	Open case	1310	172	1482
	Successful outcome	165	24	189
	Terminated unsuccessful	754	51	05
		2229	247	2476
	Successful closure rate*			
	RE adult	45.13%		
	Non-RE Adult	33.57%		
	RE Youth	32.0%		
	Non-RE Youth	17.95%		

*Successful closure rate = # Successful outcome / (# Successful outcome+ #Terminated Unsuccessful including prior to IPE) (not convention for reporting successful rehabilitation to RSA as pre-IPE closures included in analysis)

Table 10 considers all VR participants, including those who drop out or are terminated from services prior to IPE. Therefore, the “successful closure rate” will be lower than the “rehabilitation rate” as normally calculated. The table was calculated this way to consider all persons who are found eligible for VR, and the employment rates for people with disabilities derived from this table more closely match congressional figures.

Using this method of calculation, RE appears to be more effective in leading to success than non-RE. To date, the success rate for RE adults is over 11% higher than for non-RE adults, and for RE youth there is a 14% better success rate than for non-RE youth.

5. NEBRASKA VR STAFF EXPERIENCES WITH RE

Rapid Engagement Evaluation Survey—Nebraska VR Results

The ICI and NVR implemented a web-based *Rapid Engagement Evaluation Survey* of NVR staff who are responsible for implementing the PE model. The purpose of the survey was to describe NVR staff use of PE and gauge satisfaction with the model. Respondents were asked to consider referral to RE and select the top three characteristics that best describe job seekers that are a good fit for Rapid Engagement.

The most frequently selected responses were: 1) little to no work history, 2) “stuck” case (no progress in some time), and 3) client’s stated interest in obtaining work experience. The next most frequently selected response was “No set criteria: it depends on the client” (n=20 or 36.4%). (See Table 22 in the Appendices for the frequency of all responses.)

The survey included a series of three questions about the utility of the RE model across different aspects of day-to-day work, including engagement with key stakeholders. We first asked respondents to think about the usefulness of RE in daily work with job seekers, employers, and team members. Overall, the three major components of the RE model were reported to be very useful or somewhat useful by the majority of respondents. Table 11 summarizes the frequency of responses.

Table 11. Frequency of responses: Usefulness of RE model components in daily work (N=55)

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	N/A
Finding work exposures for job seekers / clients	21	27	2	0	5
Meeting employer needs	16	27	8	0	4
Communicating within the VR team (e.g. through “WIN” or team meetings)	29	21	1	1	3
Total	66	75	11	1	12

One respondent wrote in a response option (“educational for client-hands on approach”) as very useful.

Next, respondents were asked to consider the period before NVR started Rapid Engagement, and report how the RE model changed the way the respondent works. More than half of the respondents found the RE model to make work with job seekers, employers, and the VR team easier or better. About a third of respondents reported that the RE model had no effect on the way the agency worked with job seekers and within the VR team, and slightly more (43%) said the same for working with employers. Two respondents thought that the RE model made work with job seekers and employers more difficult.

Table 12. RE model impact on work (N=53)

	Easier / better	No change (business as usual)	More difficult
With jobseekers / clients	34	17	2
With employers	28	23	2
With the VR team	36	17	0
Total	98	57	4

In a similar vein, responses related to the overall utility of the RE model for service delivery were positive. Nearly all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that RE is an important tool for VR; that RE has potential to improve outcomes; and that RE allows staff to be empowered as part of the PE team. These results are summarized in Table 13.

Table 13. Frequency of responses: RE as a model for service delivery (N=54)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
RE is an important tool for VR	20	34	0	0	0
I feel that RE has a lot of potential to improve outcomes	20	34	0	0	0
RE has allowed me to be more empowered and part of the PE team	9	32	4	0	9
Total	49	100	4	0	9

The survey also included statements related to respondents' understanding of the RE model and comparison to business as usual, as well as the potential difficulties in implementing the RE model. There was limited consensus across statements, particularly with regard to the statement that "RE is pretty much business as usual with no real changes," and with the level of difficulty RE entails in engaging with clients or employers. Table 14 shows the frequency of responses.

Table 14. Frequency of responses: RE as a model for service delivery, continued

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A	Total N
I do not understand how RE differs from what we do on other cases	1	6	30	15	3	55
RE is pretty much business as usual with no real changes	3	20	18	11	2	54
RE is more difficult due to expectations regarding the intensity of contact with clients or employers	2	13	25	12	2	54
RE is more difficult because of funding issues	0	5	30	16	4	55
Total	6	44	103	54	11	

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Synopsis of Findings based on the Evaluation Questions

There will be a higher percentage of successful outcomes in RE compared with other clients (non-RE).

Outcomes for youth suggest a difference in the traditional method of measuring VR success (RE = 62% success vs 54% non-RE). For adults the results are very close (RE = 65% vs non-RE = 65%). When all consumers are taken into account, including those who exit prior to plan, then RE appears to be more effective for both adults and youth. Considering the likelihood of a more challenging demographic profile of adults in RE, this is an encouraging finding in itself.

Moreover, since times in service are considerably longer for RE clients, it is possible that the results will continue to improve for this group over the next year or two when the higher percentage of consumers in RE are closed.

The percent of clients in RE will increase over time.

As demonstrated by Table 5, the percent of clientele referred into RE expanded from approximately 2.5% of all clients in December 2015, to over 6% of adults and 10% of youth in June 2017. Although NVR administration agreed to a goal of 200 total new cases per year, this target was exceeded by nearly double to 700 in RE at the end of the project period.

Aside from the enthusiasm from the field for this VR option, the NVR project lead is recognized for her continuing work to improve this VR option. From the monthly phone calls with ICI (Moore & Haines), it became obvious that her mentorship, guidance, trainings, and feedback to the field staff greatly improved the adoption of this program. At the present time, approximately 11% of all clientele in VT DVR enter PE, and NE appears to be approaching this overall percentage. Since the beginning of the NVR replication project, approximately 10% of youth and 6.4% of adults have entered RE.

The duration from application to first work experience will decrease over time.

The 3rd hypothesis was not supported – i.e., the time from application to first work exposure did not shorten as the project continued. Almost the opposite was observed. However, the excellent outcomes for RE do not seem to make this measure nearly as important as was anticipated. NVR takes the concept of “early engagement” to the logical conclusion that select services should begin as soon after application as possible. The policies, personnel (especially vocational evaluators and transition staff), and practices promote early exploration of job matching and rehabilitation objectives that are individualized and timely, especially for clientele who would benefit from such exposure.

A post-hoc analysis of correlation between successful outcome and timing of the RE after application suggested that RE itself, not proximity of work exposure to application date, is the deciding factor in rehabilitation success. The duration from application to first RE tended to grow wider as the project continued, and this same phenomenon was observed in other replication sites. This may be a factor of caseload size and prioritization of resources by personnel responsible for job placement and employment exposures.

Case costs will be higher for RE than others not in RE.

Using case cost data from QE2, case costs appear to be higher for persons in RE than those not in RE. One difference in NVR from the other replication sites is that the agency does not rely to a great

degree on CRPs to provide employment-related services. This changes the accounting of service delivery costs, effectively lowering them for RE services. The longer open case time in RE may change the actual case costs slightly over the next year as more people in RE are closed.

The number of employers providing work experiences will increase by 20%.

Insufficient specificity linking work exposures to specific businesses existed in the databases (other than text files) to rigorously test this hypothesis. However, the growth in the number of businesses willing to provide experiences, plus the addition of so many new BAM positions, strongly suggest that the goal was most likely met.

Anecdotal evidence in the form of staff comments offered appreciation for the BAM positions. However, some employment specialists continued to be concerned that short-term placements of some clients in employment settings would jeopardize those sites if the client did not fulfill the agreed-upon obligation.

It is suggested that booster sessions on RE be conducted with employment specialists to solidify how and when the specialist can make certain that job sites are not lost because of unsuccessful placements. It is further recommended that NVR consider enhancing its business database so that specific businesses can be linked with client-specific data.

The percent of RE consumers in field offices will vary by BAM regions.

Overall, approximately 6% of adults and 10% of youth ended up in RE statewide during the evaluation period. There was variation in the percent of clients in RE for youth and adults by BAM regions, and this pattern is similar to what has been observed in VT. Interestingly, the highest percentage of RE adults occurred in a region without a designated BAM (Scottsbluff/North Platte), with 9.6% of adults in RE average in that region. The highest percent of youth in RE was 15.6 % in Col/Frem/North Fork. There are likely multiple factors that influence this distribution, including case mix, staff case load specialties or job duties, number and commitment of BAMs, and supervisor influences.

Additional Evaluation Question: Severity of Disability

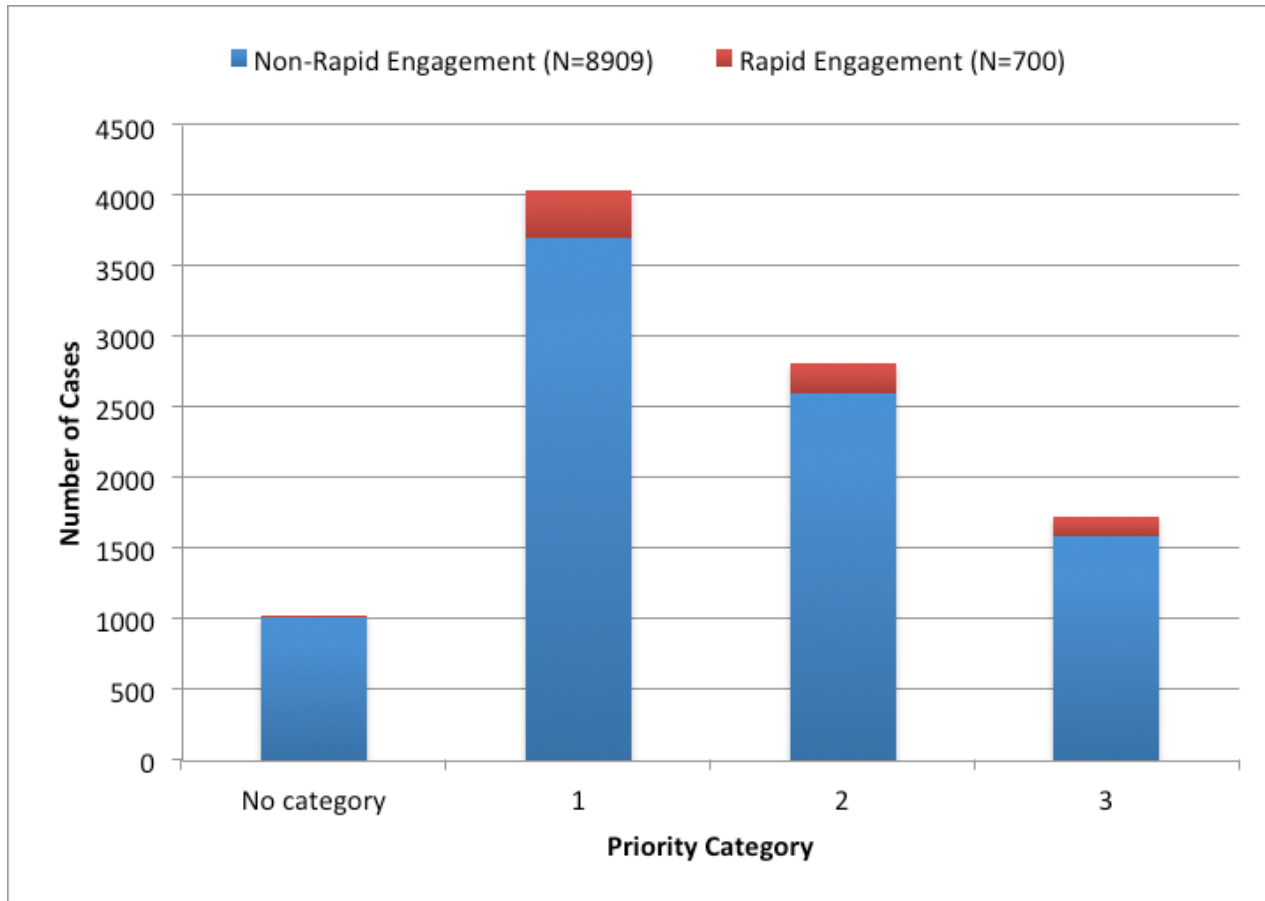
Preliminary discussions of this evaluation report with NVR administrators identified an addition of topic of concern, namely the potential impact of RE on the decision to implement Order of Selection. Specifically, does the distribution of Priority Categories of participants in RE differ from those of the general VR population? Table 15 and Figure 3 provide some insight into this question.

The distribution of cases across Priority Categories for RE closely matches that of non-RE cases. RE cases represent individuals in all categories, with almost half in Priority Category 1, a third in Priority Category 2, and one-fifth in Priority Category 3. Just over 1,000 cases in the QE2 dataset had Priority Category blank and are noted as “No category” in the chart. These cases were in the assessment stage prior to eligibility, and/or terminated prior to determination of eligibility at the time of the report. Nebraska VR was waiting for medical information, or in some cases, an on-the-job evaluation (OJE) was in progress to assess work issues to determine priority categorization in conjunction with eligibility.

Table 15. Priority category distribution of cases

Priority Category	Non-Rapid Engagement (N=8909)	Rapid Engagement (N=700)	Total
No category	1016 (11.4%)	6 (0.9%)	1022
1	3704 (41.6%)	337 (48.1%)	4041
2	2599 (29.2%)	219 (31.3%)	2818
3	1590 (17.8%)	138 (19.7%)	1728
Total	8909	700	9609

Figure 3. Priority category distribution for RE and non-RE cases



7. ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ADHERENCE TO PROGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT MODEL. Although the NVR model is not specifically called “progressive employment,” the “rapid engagement” option offered under “Meet you where you are” is very close to the PE approach used in VT DVR. This is supported by the fidelity-to-model observations listed above, as well as the demographic and outcome data available on NVR RE consumers that parallels VT DVR. The fidelity-to-model information is contained in Tables 1 & 2 and the accompanying text contained above.

In addition, the demographic and outcome data in NE match VT in many ways, e.g., profile of clientele served, mean # RE experiences per consumer, high- vs low-dose ratio of RE experiences, and the comparable rates of successful outcomes (especially of NE youth). Consumers using RE include individuals with a 50% higher incidence of SSDI/SSI receipt for youth, and nearly double the incidence for adults compared with other NVR clientele. RE recipients also have a lower rate of employment at the time of application. In spite of this, the educational levels, gender balance, and ethnic balance are approximately the same for RE and non-RE participants. The category of disability severity for RE recipients is slightly higher in percentage for category I, but generally matches the distribution of severity for all NVR participants.

RE OUTCOMES. Given the profile of persons entering RE, the outcome statistics are impressive. RE appears to be an effective means for addressing individuals with a limited work history or conditions that might stigmatize or otherwise seriously prevent them from finding successful employment. This approach appears to be particularly effective for youth, as demonstrated by a successful rehabilitation rate of 62% of RE youth vs 54% of non-RE youth (using the standard convention for reporting VR success). The potential role of RE with or after Pre-ETS and with transition services seems particularly promising.

An additional unexpected benefit of RE is the dramatic decrease in drop-out rates prior to IPE. The drop-out rates prior to IPE for adults and youth were decreased by nearly two thirds for individuals in RE. The apparent effectiveness of RE in reducing closures prior to IPE is worth continued monitoring and evaluation.

NVR is the only agency currently using RE/PE prior to IPE. Research in VR supports the claim that early intervention is quite effective in retaining consumers in VR as well as linking them with jobs. Furthermore, the literature suggests that early work experiences are especially helpful when working with youth. The linking of vocational evaluation with RE is seen as a promising tool for those consumers who have limited successful prior work experience.

STAFF ROLES IN RE. As stated in the ICI fidelity report, NVR staff seem to be particularly flexible in the roles and responsibilities that they undertake. This reflects a sense of team cooperation as well as ingenuity and dedication in serving clients. These attributes seem compatible with the RE/PE model, as team communication and cooperation are critical elements.

The staff satisfaction survey data on RE suggest that some job placement staff still are on the fence about the benefits of RE, which may be expected given the short time this intervention has been used. We recommend additional booster sessions for job placement personnel.

The vocational evaluation staff in NVR appear to understand the value of RE, as they have been active in referring clients for early RE experiences. These staff appeared to be responsible for nearly half of RE referrals, especially when those work experiences were organized prior to plan. Although

the pre-IPE experiences tend to extend the time from application to plan, the lower rates of early dropout, as well as the rates of success, clearly suggest that the model is paying dividends for the vocational evaluation staff and NVR in general. Staff referrals for transition youth also contributed significantly to this model.

A more detailed analysis of survey responses suggests that staff think that RE has improved the provision of VR services and works well with employers; however, some respondents consistently described RE as “business as usual,” and some expressed concern with the time commitment required to provide RE services, suggesting there is an opportunity for additional training and refinement of the model.

COST DATA. The cost data suggest that RE is compatible with the funding structures in NVR, as most services are provided in house. This is an internal staff expense, and as such it side-steps the costs normally associated with contracted services that most state VR programs encounter. Outcome data suggest that RE is more costly than services as usual; however, some ambivalence in “costs” definitions make it prudent to continue investigation into this question.

ANNUAL CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY. Although the NVR annual client satisfaction survey did not differentiate clients who received RE, the overall change in “job meets needs” between 2015 and 2016 was notable. Mark Schultz remarked that RE likely contributed to the increase in client satisfaction. Future satisfaction surveys may be able to tease this out, with the caveat that many VR consumers are not always able to identify the specific program or services that they received during their tenure as a client with the agency.

Table 16. Statewide VR client satisfaction survey comparison 2015–2016 Q1

	FY2016 Q1	FY2015Q1
Surveys completed	335	312
Currently employed	94.03%	88.78%
Job meets needs	96.52%	81.95%
How likely to recommend VR to friend or family		
Very likely	87.16%	86.54%
Somewhat likely	10.15%	8.65%
Very & somewhat likely total	97.31%	95.15%
Neutral	2.09%	2.24%
Somewhat unlikely	00.0%	1.28%
Very unlikely	0.60%	1.28%
Somewhat and very unlikely total	0.60%	2.56%

Taken from agency document

DATA COLLECTION IN RE. Concomitant with additional trainings or dialogue with staff, we recommend that administrative staff in concert with QE2 data staff and ICI personnel consider additional ways that RE experiences can be recorded in the QE2 database. There is evidence suggesting that not all persons who received an RE experience were recorded as such, especially for those who may have had a “low-dose” experience such as a company tour.

Data from the business contacts spreadsheet indicate that nearly double the number of businesses have been contacted since the BAMs were hired. This is outstanding. It is recommended that all staff be encouraged to use this database. In particular, dates and the topics of discussion on follow-ups with businesses could be documented so that the patterns of interaction with businesses can be evaluated at a later date. Client-specific information also could be maintained in this database, including a categorical variable “yes” or “no” to indicate if any client placements have occurred with this business.

Further, a protocol for including the primary NVR contact with the business could be considered so that staff who are attempting placements are able to talk with the individual who might have the strongest relationship with that business prior to placement attempts. Variables that VT DVR have found particularly helpful pertain to who, how often, when, and where the primary business contact prefers to have follow-up contact from the BAM or job placement persons.

The relatively short timeframe of evaluation for RE has already produced some encouraging and positive findings. Since the data collection infrastructure is already in place, it will be enlightening to continue to evaluate this program and client outcomes over the next several years. And given the growing interest in PE within the VR community, NVR can continue to lead the field in this exciting work.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Additional RE Demographic and Outcome Tables

Table 17. Demographic information of RE and non-RE youth and adults

	Rapid Engagement				Non-Rapid Engagement			
	Youth (N=247)		Adult (N=453)		Youth (N=2229)		Adult (N=6680)	
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION								
Sex								
Female	89	36.0%	203	44.8%	935	41.9%	2959	44.3%
Male	158	64.0%	250	55.2%	1294	58.1%	3721	55.7%
Age at Application								
Mean	18.56		42.34		18.85		42.05	
Median	18.12		42.98		18.48		41.07	
Race								
American Indian or Alaska Native	5	2.0%	6	1.3%	40	1.8%	218	3.3%
Asian	2	0.8%	6	1.3%	20	0.9%	50	0.7%
Black/African American	15	6.1%	28	6.2%	145	6.5%	654	9.8%
Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	0.3%	14	0.2%
White	225	91.1%	413	91.2%	2018	90.5%	5744	86.0%
Ethnicity								
Hispanic/Latino	38	15.4%	38	8.4%	261	11.7%	498	7.5%
Level of Education Attained at Application								
Below HS	159	64.4%	92	20.3%	1334	59.8%	1017	15.2%
HS Grad	77	31.2%	185	40.8%	739	33.2%	2831	42.4%
Post-Secondary	11	4.5%	134	29.6%	152	6.8%	2101	31.5%
BA	0	0.0%	36	7.9%	2	0.1%	527	7.9%
BA above	0	0.0%	6	1.3%	2	0.1%	204	3.1%
SSDI Status at Application								
No	243	98.4%	383	84.5%	2205	98.9%	6118	91.6%
Yes	4	1.6%	70	15.5%	24	1.1%	562	8.4%
SSI Status at Application								
No	236	95.5%	421	92.9%	2153	96.6%	6400	95.8%
Yes	11	4.5%	32	7.1%	76	3.4%	280	4.2%
Corrections Involvement								
No	247	100%	453	100%	2229	100%	6672	99.90%
Yes	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	8	0.1%
EMPLOYMENT AT APPLICATION								
Employment Status								
Competitive Supported	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	0.0%	1	0.0%
Competitive Unsupported	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	6	0.3%	9	0.1%
Employed	41	16.6%	71	15.7%	484	21.7%	1926	28.8%
Employed With Supports	2	0.8%	1	0.2%	13	0.6%	35	0.5%
Homemaker	0	0.0%	10	2.2%	3	0.1%	103	1.5%
Not Employed	90	36.4%	355	78.4%	762	34.2%	4404	65.9%
Not Employed: All Other Students	10	4.0%	5	1.1%	70	3.1%	65	1.0%
Not Employed: Student In High School	101	40.9%	0	0.0%	873	39.2%	10	0.1%
Self employment Independent Contracting	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.0%
Self-employment	0	0.0%	5	1.1%	4	0.2%	93	1.4%
Unpaid Family worker	1	0.4%	1	0.2%	7	0.3%	14	0.2%
Unpaid Trainee, Intern, Volunteer	2	0.8%	5	1.1%	6	0.3%	18	0.3%
Weekly Earnings								
Mean	173.27		424.28		214.26		424.33	
Median	160		400		180		360	
Hours Worked in a Week								
Mean	19.98		32		21.56		31.11	
Median	20		39		20		35	

Table 18. VR case details and closure information

	Rapid Engagement				Non-Rapid Engagement			
	Youth		Adult		Youth		Adult	
	(N=247)		(N=453)		(N=2229)		(N=6680)	
VR office / team (number of cases)								
Omaha Downtown	2	0.8%	6	1.3%	38	1.7%	262	3.9%
Grand Island)	5	2.0%	5	1.1%	44	2.0%	136	2.0%
Columbus	31	12.6%	41	9.1%	232	10.4%	570	8.5%
Grand Island	30	12.1%	78	17.2%	274	12.3%	854	12.8%
Kearney	19	7.7%	24	5.3%	139	6.2%	418	6.3%
Lincoln	53	21.5%	129	28.5%	513	23.0%	1737	26.0%
Norfolk	57	23.1%	35	7.7%	254	11.4%	593	8.9%
North Platte	14	5.7%	22	4.9%	226	10.1%	377	5.6%
Omaha	13	5.3%	14	3.1%	267	12.0%	800	12.0%
Omaha West	11	4.5%	25	5.5%	107	4.8%	536	8.0%
Scottsbluff	11	4.5%	48	10.6%	129	5.8%	348	5.2%
State Office - Schultz	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	5	0.1%
State Office Service Team	1	0.4%	26	5.7%	6	0.3%	44	0.7%

Table 19. Case status and flow outcomes

Case Status (open / closed)								
	Progressive Employment				Non-Progressive Employment			
	Youth		Adult		Youth		Adult	
	(N=247)		(N=453)		(N=2229)		(N=6680)	
Open	172	69.6%	258	57.0%	1310	58.8%	2525	37.8%
Successful outcome	24	9.7%	88	19.4%	165	7.4%	1395	20.9%
Terminated	51	20.6%	107	23.6%	754	33.8%	2760	41.3%
Time in status								
Days from Application to Eligibility								
Mean	23.58		21.89		26.6		19.4	
Median	15		14		19		13	
Days from Eligibility to IPE								
Mean	173		70.39		89.11		28.96	
Median	132		42		32.5		10	

Appendix 2: Additional Staff Survey Results

Table 20. Characteristics of clients referred to RE

Characteristic of Clients	Frequency	Percent
Little to no work history	27	49.1%
“Stuck” case (no progress in some time)	22	40.0%
Client’s stated interest in obtaining work experience	21	38.2%
Soft skills or behavioral issues	18	32.7%
Nature of the client’s disability (e.g. most significant disability MSD)	11	20.0%
Previous job failure	9	16.4%
Client’s geographic location	3	5.5%
No set criteria: it depends on the client	20	36.4%
Other - Write In	3	5.5%
None of the above	1	1.8%

OTHER RESPONSES INCLUDED:

- Ready to work or wanting to learn more about an industry or industries
- Unclear direction or goal; need to explore
- Client is ready to work, has an idea of what wants to do

	Rapid Engagement				Non-Rapid Engagement			
	Youth		Adult		Youth		Adult	
	(N=247)		(N=453)		(N=2229)		(N=6680)	
Successful outcome	24	9.7%	88	19.4%	165	7.4%	1395	20.9%
Terminated after plan	14	5.7%	47	10.4%	136	6.1%	677	10.1%
Terminated prior to plan	37	15.0%	60	13.2%	618	27.7%	2083	31.2%
Traditional rehab rate (success/success+ terminated after plan)	63.2%		65.2%		54.8%		67.3%	
Overall success rate all cases (success/success+ all terminated)	32.0%		45.1%		18.0%		33.6%	
Competitive Employment at Closure								
<i>Days from Application to Closure</i>								
Mean	325.23		272.71		231.89		181.28	
Median	313.5		244		216		153	
<i>Days from Eligibility to Closure</i>								
Mean	310.94		253.37		228.45		180.17	
Median	294.5		230		208.5		153	
<i>Days from IPE to Closure</i>								
Mean	253.86		225.58		227.25		197.11	
Median	217		195		207		165	
<i>Weekly Earnings at Closure</i>								
Mean	269.29		316.44		331.32		437.17	
Median	250		285.6		320		400	
<i>Hours Worked in a Week at Closure</i>								
Mean	24.96		28.1		30.4		32.86	
Median	22		25.5		30		40	

The final question of the survey provided an open text box for all respondents to write any additional comments about their experience using the RE model. Seventeen respondents answered this question. The open-ended responses most often reflected positive opinions about the importance and effectiveness of RE. There were several comments indicating the time or effort required in implementing RE, and a few other notes on use and understanding of the model.

IMPORTANCE OF RE AS A TOOL:

- I enjoy using the Rapid Engagement model with jobseekers that are unsure of a job direction because they do not know what they would like to do and/or they are not sure what they are capable of doing. I think it helps to give jobseekers hope and exposure to help them continue to move forward.
- I use RE almost on a daily basis. Since I have been using it, I have made a ton of business contacts and that has made me more effective with my clients. I have seen a ton of successes using this model.
- Very important tool

USE OF RE WITH SPECIFIC POPULATIONS:

- I work with many clients with significant challenges, that have little to no progress over a great amount of time. I utilize RE in conjunction with Customized Employment, and I enjoy the level of engagement.
- It is a great tool to use with clients. I like to use it in smaller towns or areas where there are limited opportunities available in specific job goals so they can explore other job areas to find the right fit.
- I have found RE to be an important tool, especially when working with students.
- Rapid engagement comes naturally to me often because the population that I work with (Deaf/hard of hearing) often struggle understanding why there are some barriers to their employment that are there and they may have good skill/abilities/history that are not taken seriously because of their hearing loss and rapid engagement can be a way to help them and potential employers to notice their true skills and true barriers.

USING RE TO GENERATE IDEAS:

- As a team we have come up with some really good job ideas for the client and able to also talk about any frustrations we have about a case.
- We have used rapid engagement to come up with new ideas for jobs with our clients and also find connections within businesses to talk to.

TIME TO IMPLEMENT RE:

- RE is more time intensive and as an evaluator I am spending a lot more time finding employers who will work with VR clients. In rural areas this can be a challenge. Some team members use RE as a way to screen out clients or prove they are not ready for competitive work, rather than using it as a process to help clients achieve the next level of what they are ready for.
- Rapid Engagement is time consuming, but the results are worth the investment, especially with clients who have minimal exposure to the world of work.
- We use a lot of paid OJE's. These are great for the clients to test their work stamina after a long lay-off from the workforce. Unfortunately they take a while to set up, and the clients can get discouraged while we coordinate with the employer to define job duties and set up a start date that works well for the employer. In some ways this removes the "rapid" out of the process.

- While I have less experience with RE activities, I find them to be an effective evaluation tool, more effective than many assessments performed outside of a workplace; however, they're quite time consuming causing more stress on myself and my teammates.

UNDERSTANDING AND USE OF RE:

- RE is not utilized as much as it could be. Not sure if counselors understand.
- changes my job duties and has been an adjustment for me, but overall a great tool
- Will do more, depending on consumers needs.
- RE as been pretty much what we have always done but now we have a title for it and are tracking it.

Appendix 3. Description of Progressive Employment Learning Collaborative

The Progressive Employment Learning Collaborative facilitates cross-state discussions and lessons learned about the replication of the PE model to study the impact on employment outcomes for people with disabilities in state VR agency settings. Learning Collaborative activities include: regularly scheduled virtual meetings; the dissemination of knowledge and resources to all participating agencies; and the creation and application of multiple training resources informed by research and the field. The five participating state VR agencies are: Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Florida Division of Blind Services, Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Oregon Commission for the Blind, and Nebraska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Each state has played an integral role in sharing lessons learned and observations about the PE model implementation according to their unique state experiences:

- Vermont DVR led many of the LC discussions. As the first state to implement the model, Hugh Bradshaw in Vermont has served as a trainer to help other states think through solutions and strategies for multiple challenges related to job development, including utilizing employment specialists and business account managers focus attention engaging and relationship building with local small businesses.
- Nebraska VR shared their unique perspectives as the only LC participant that provides employment services directly. Their "Meet You Where You Are Model" has had great success and they have been a great resource for states to brainstorm about marketing the success of the PE model for consumers and businesses.
- Maine BRS shared their experiences applying the PE model to transition-age youth consumers. As Maine relies on CRPs for job placement, they have contributed to the LC discussions with a focus on CRP business outreach and involvement that leads to better employment outcomes and experiences for their youth with disabilities in Lewiston and Portland (later expansion to Bangor and Augusta).
- Oregon CFB shared their experiences as a blind agency implementing PE. They shared challenges and successes as the main VR office in Portland piloted PE for blind and/ or low vision transition-age youth consumers who have barriers to maintaining employment.
- Florida DBS shared their experiences as a few of their field offices piloted PE. Their approach of applying the model to engage consumers who have been receiving VR for two years or more without recent progress had some challenges and small successes that were shared with the LC participants.

The LC also featured Monthly Job Development Virtual Conferences hosted by the ICI in partnership with Vermont DVR. The virtual conferences were about topics specific to those who directly interact with businesses at participating VR agencies. The virtual conferences covered an array of topics, such as:

- [How to help VTPE consumers through application processes](#)
- [Nebraska VR's progressive employment marketing strategies](#)
- [How to help VTPE consumers overcome criminal background checks](#)
- [VTPE business relations with "Big Box" stores.](#)