

## State and Tribal VR Working Together: Partnerships That Allow Students and Youth with Disabilities to Succeed – Part 2

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: All right. Hello, everyone. Welcome to part two of our continuing conversation on State and Tribal VR Working Together-- Partnerships That Allow Students and Youth with Disabilities to Succeed. I'm Christine Johnson, technical assistance provider on the Pre-Employment Transition Services team with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition-- The Collaborative, here at George Washington University, the Center for Rehabilitation Counseling Research and Education. Whew, that was a lot. A lot of words there. I'm going to allow Wayne to introduce himself.

WAYNE DAGEL: Good morning, everybody. My name is Wayne Dagele, and I am the director for the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center. I just had to match you, Christine, on the length of our name. So that's good.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: I don't know, I think I beat you. I think I had maybe a little bit more there.

WAYNE DAGEL: So we just shorten that to AIVRTTAC. And AIVRTTAC provides technical assistance and training on transition services to tribal VR programs.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: And the NTACT's overarching goal is to assist the state education agencies, local education agencies, VR agencies, and VR service providers to implement promising practices for students with disabilities and helping them prepare for success in post-secondary education and employment. We are very excited to have all of you with us today. And we hope that this session really generates a lot of conversation, both during the webinar and hopefully as you go back to your day-to-day work, wherever that may be.

I would like to tell you that this training was developed with support from the Center for Innovative Training in Vocational Rehabilitation, or CIT-VR, as we call it. Also the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition-- The Collaborative. And we call that the NTACT:C. And the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center. And as Wayne said, it's AIVRTTAC. All of this is funded by the US Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services through the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Today, we've got a whole host of folks with us. We've got Wayne, as you can see, the director for the AIVRTTAC. I'm Christine Johnson, a technical assistance provider with the NTACT:C. We have with us from Washington State, Christopher Zilar, who's the director of vocational rehabilitation with the Spokane Tribe of Indians, and Donna Adamson, a vocational rehabilitation counselor with the Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Moving down the country a little bit, we see the Arizona folks. So we've got Joshua Drywater with us, who's the program manager for Native initiatives with the University of Arizona Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities, and Abel Young, director of the community services for the same center. We have Paula Seanez, who is the program director with the Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, and Traci Przecioski statewide transition coordinator with the Arizona Department of Economic Security Vocational Rehabilitation.

All right, so today's learning objectives. Describing the importance of implementing a memorandum of understanding, or the memorandum of agreement, between the state VR and tribal VR; we hope that you understand what transition services are and what pre-employment transition services are and the populations that receive them; recognizing the examples of some effective roles, relationships, and communications between state VR and tribal VR partners and being able to identify service delivery approaches that can contribute to increasing positive post-secondary outcomes for Native American students with disabilities.

I would like to take this time to say that, in case you missed our part 1 of this series, which is the watch party, we hope you take the time to go to the state VR website, or it's also on the AIVRTTAC website and also listed on the NTACT:C website, the watch party on state and tribal VR working together that we did on December 7.

It's actually broken up into four different recordings. So they're about 20 to 25 minutes each. So you can actually view them separately in smaller chunks of time. And I really suggest that you do that because it's a great way to get some more background on our topic for today.

We have a poll up. If everyone could take just a few seconds here and answer these poll questions, we will go through them. You'll find the answers as we go through the continuing slides. All right. Wayne, you want to go through these?

WAYNE DAGEL: Sure. So the first question we asked was the main difference between state VR and tribal VR is that tribal VR can provide culturally appropriate services, and state VR cannot. And we have several people answering true, several people answering false, and some unsure.

So in this situation, as we'll learn as we go through, that is true. The main difference between state and tribal VR is that tribal VR is able to provide culturally appropriate services to their participants.

Number two, we have every tribal VR project and state VR agency needs to develop a collaborative MOU/MOA. We have, again, a mixed bag here. We have some true, false, and

unsure. In this situation, it is, again, true. We are required to develop these MOUs between the state and the tribal VR projects. And that's captured in the Rehab Act.

Number three, transition services are a specific type of services only for students or youth with a disability. And again, we've got a mixed bag-- true, false, unsure. And this is true.

And then number four, pre-employment transition services are a specific set of five service areas provided by state VR agencies to students with a disability. And we've got a mixed bag here. But again, that's true. There's five different service categories, or areas, that are provided to students and youth with a disability.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: I think number four, we had the highest number of true answers, right?

WAYNE DAGEL: Yes, that is true-- 65 out of 73.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: All right, excellent. OK. Well, then I would say half of our job is done here. [CHUCKLES]

WAYNE DAGEL: Yes. [CHUCKLES]

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: All right, great. So let's go over some of the basics. And as you see on the screen, we're looking at, what is the state vocational rehabilitation program, and what is the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services program? And somebody's probably sitting there thinking, really? Do we have to go through this?

After our last webinar, we actually had some questions-- and I've actually heard some of these questions before, even, we did these webinars-- but there's basically a lot of people that weren't aware of the AIVRS programs, the American Indian programs, or weren't sure what state VR was.

And I find that, even in my, whether it's professional or personal life when I tell someone what I do and all, and they're like, what is vocational rehabilitation? So we're just wanting to make sure, for all of our audience participants, that we make sure we're all on the same playing field here.

So the state VR services program is authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV of WIOA, which is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. It's a program that provides grants to assist states in operating a statewide vocational rehabilitation program that's also part of the state workforce development system.

State VRs can provide vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities that's consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice in order to help them prepare and engage in competitive integrated employment or supported employment and to be able to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

The state vocational rehabilitation program is federally funded through RSA. And it's done by formula grant awards that goes to the states and the territories to operate these. And so now, I'll let Wayne talk about what you're going to find under CFR 371.1.

WAYNE DAGEL: Right. So as Christine mentioned, all of the Rehab Act and all of the fun title IV WIOA language, we are funded under that, or housed under that, same information. And the 371 guides the American Indian Vocational Rehab Services program specifically towards culturally appropriate services to enrolled eligible participants for each tribal VR program.

Now, that's the big difference between state VR and tribal VR is that culturally appropriate service provision, which is required that we provide. The other big piece that separates state from tribal VR is that these tribal VR programs are funded under RSA through discretionary grants.

So the tribal VR programs are competing against each other for the funding to develop these projects. And they are awarded to different eligible tribes, not states. And through this language, the tribal VR program is seen as on the same level as a state VR program in the operation and in the service provision to participants.

The other defining piece of the tribal VR programs is that they are provided to individuals that are eligible that reside on or near federal or state reservations. And we also take in the "Great 8" as a piece of their service provision.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: So hopefully, that helps. These are live links. And so these resources are available for you on the website. And so go ahead, and when you download them, click on these links because it'll take you to those federal regulations and that explanation.

And also, one of our resource slides also has the AIVRTTAC's website where you can actually see the United States and territories. And you see where all the tribal programs are. But we'll get there.

So working together. Again, this is a little bit of a recap and maybe a deeper dive from our first webinar. It starts with that memorandum of agreement and what you see on the screen are those federal regulations-- 361.24, 361.30, and 371.21-- that really describe and mandate that there be a memorandum of agreement and coordination between state vocational rehabilitation and tribal VR programs.

These, again, those live links, please make sure that you click to go through these. Under WIOA, we are mandated to have agreements and cooperation with a number of other public programs. We don't serve the consumers that we work with in a vacuum. So the law recognizes that it's really essential that, in order to do the work that we do, that we coordinate with these other programs that can either supplement or complement the services that we provide.

So having this memorandum of agreement really ensures that the critically needed services can be provided to Native American, Alaska Native people with disabilities by allowing both the

state program and the tribal program to kind of braid their funding, pool together resources, provide services that may otherwise not be able to happen for the mutual benefit of consumers. What else, Wayne? What else does our memorandum of agreement--

WAYNE DAGEL: Well, the MOU is really a joint effort. And in the development of the MOU, it's important that we have the state representatives and the directors meeting with the tribal VR directors and coming to the table together to create this MOU as a cooperative work together. It's collaborative. And it identifies the needed services, or needed supports, that both people benefit from in this partnership.

It's not just a one-sided state providing services to the tribal VR programs. It's also what the tribal VR program can provide to the state. So we want to identify the different levels of service provision, the community connections for getting out into the Native communities and serving those youth and students with disabilities. So it's really important that we have this open dialogue and this development in the creation of the MOU.

Yes, it's mandated by law. And a lot of times, we have heard that tribal VR programs get handed a document saying, here's an MOU. Sign it. But that's not really the true intention of what that is about.

It's about coming together as a team and sitting down and developing what's going to work best for the state VR program and the tribal VR program. It really gives that opportunity for growth and expansion for both programs to serve a very underserved, sometimes even unserved, population.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Yeah. It starts with the memorandum of agreement. It just lays that foundation. And it doesn't start and end with just that piece of paper. We really have to operationalize it and make it a living document.

So we have a question in the chat from Bettina, who asked, if a student ends up with an OPWDD program, does the state of VR bow out of services once OPWDD becomes involved? I can answer that. Maybe you can, too, Wayne.

Both parties, the state VR and tribal, can refer applicants to one another for consideration of vocational rehabilitation services. So both programs can provide simultaneous services to mutual consumers, especially if there's a resource or a service that's needed by that eligible consumer.

And let's say it's only available from, or most appropriately provided by, one agency or the other. So you don't have to close out one case. It just because your consumer is involved with the other vocational program. So I hope that answers it. And I think we'll probably-- oh, we're getting some really great questions here, Wayne.

WAYNE DAGEL: Yeah. So to follow up on the last one, shared cases are important because then both agencies work together. And so, just like we talk about the MOU being a collaborative

process, so are shared cases. You work together. You fill in the holes for each other. And you provide that individual with the service that gets the barriers removed to employment.

The only time I really see any type of ownership or that type of thinking is when it comes to the culturally appropriate services. The state VR programs can't provide culturally appropriate services, but the tribal VR programs can. And sometimes that is traditional healing and that type of thing in those cases when it's happening.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: We have another question that says, how often should the MOU or MOA be updated? It doesn't really specify in the regulations. It says on a regular basis. So if you look at most types of agreements, they could be, you might want to say, yearly or every two years. I've seen maybe every six years, or sooner if needed.

So it's not that you sign it and then put it away somewhere and then, oh, in five years, we need to do this. You should be looking at it at a regular basis, just to see, hey, have-- and you're having conversations and meetings. So you can look and say, hey, maybe we should update this MOA now, or soon, because we want to really define and talk about providing X, Y, Z. So again, it's-- yeah, go on.

WAYNE DAGEL: The updating or the review of the MOU really also depends on the relationship you have with the state and the tribal VR representatives. I know several states where it's a phone call between the directors or representatives that just takes place. Hey, we got this new thing happening. Can we meet and talk about it?

I also know, with other states that are involved with tribal VR programs, that the relationship isn't as healthy as it could be. So it's more of a formal approach to where, at least annually, they meet and go over it.

And in some cases, I've even seen it go for the duration of the five-year discretionary grant. So it really depends on how your relationship is developed with the state and the tribal VR programs and the ongoing need.

As we talked about before, it's a living document. It's not a document that you just stick on your shelf and forget about it. You want to continually use it and make sure that the communication is taking place between the two projects or programs.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: All right. So serving students and youth with disabilities, it starts with transition. And that's the million-dollar question. If I were to ask everyone to put in the chat, what is transition, we'll probably get a lot of different responses. So John, let's go to the next slide and see what we have.

When we look at the word "transition," it really means-- in the dictionary, anyway-- it says to make a change, or to shift from one state or subject or place to another. So when we look at serving our students and youth with disabilities, we're talking about that transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Just as we start off in kindergarten or first grade, elementary school, we then transition into, maybe, junior high school, then into high school, this is a-- it's a time of change. Any of you who are parents and have teenagers, you know it's a time of change. You don't even recognize that child, probably, for a few years. You're saying, whatever happened to that sweet young son or daughter that I had?

Well, yes, it's a time of physical changes. It's a time of emotional growth, learning about the world. It can be difficult. I'm too old to remember back then, but I'm sure it was-- I don't want to go back to it. That's for sure.

One point that I'd like to make out is that serving transition-age students and youth is really different from working with adults. And so in the VR program, traditionally, for years, we've served adults.

To work with our students and youth really requires us to use a different type of skill set. And it just takes some getting used to, I think. Many people will tell you, oh, I'm not really comfortable. I don't know how to talk to a teenager. I don't know how to talk to a student. Wayne, anything you wanted to add?

WAYNE DAGEL: Yeah. When you talk about a different skill set, absolutely. It does require such a different perspective on how you approach that individual. Remember, when you look back on brain development and developmental stages, when they're hitting that teenager years, their synapses are disconnecting and reconnecting.

And they literally are brain dead for a little bit. So having this conversation of what do you want to do in your future to somebody who is barely surviving till lunch is really a difficult situation, so having that different perspective on how to approach them, allowing them the opportunity to explore and experience what work life is like.

Many of them are coming from a situation where they're doing chores, and that's the only work experience they've had. So to have that opportunity to expand their experiential base is incredibly important. So having that different perspective, I think, is really important.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Absolutely. So this is the official definition of transition services. And what you see at the top, the links, are actually the definition that you find in the state vocational rehabilitation program, the definition under the AIVRTTAC programs, and also the definition under education, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, definition.

And all of them are spot on, almost word for word, exactly the same. Transition services are a coordinated set of activities for a student or youth with a disability. It's an outcome-oriented process. It's designed to help move that student or youth from school to post-school activities, whatever it may be for that individual, whether it's continuing education and training, competitive, integrated employment, or supported employment, adult services, independent living, or just being able to participate in the community.

And it's based on that student or youth's needs, taking into account their preferences and interests. It includes instruction, community experiences, the development of employment, and other types of post-school adult living objectives and, if it's appropriate, acquiring those daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

And it promotes and facilitates for them to have that achievement of an employment outcome that they've had identified in their Individualized Plan for Employment, the IPE. And it includes outreach to, and engagement of, the parents or the representative of such student and a youth with a disability.

So under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, it really made changes to the definition of transition services so that now, it's consistent between the state VR program and the tribal program to say that it's applying to students and youth with disabilities and includes that outreach to parents. So as Wayne said, it's really just about helping them make that transition from being children to being adults and what does that mean for them.

WAYNE DAGEL: We have a question in the chat box I just saw come up.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: OK, sure.

WAYNE DAGEL: And it pertains to this. So where's the best place to find, for a specific state, the legal requirements related to providing transition services, such as when a guardian's or parent's signature is needed, or they must be present?

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: So I'm going to say, specifically, your state education-- well, I don't know, Wayne. Is it also the same under the tribal education?

WAYNE DAGEL: That's a good question, and I don't have an answer for that one. I would have to do some research. Paula, maybe you can--

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Paula put it in our-- the parent training and information centers. Thank you, Paula. Yeah, these are in every state. And they're also technical assistance to help parents deal with a lot of the legal issues that come up when you have a child with a disability. But yes, your parent and training information center is great, and, also, your state education.

Side-by-side delivery of transition services. So we just looked at the definition of transition and, again, education, state vocational rehabilitation and tribal vocational rehabilitation. So under WIOA, we are now all operating off that same page. We now have pre-employment transition services, which are five specific services that can be provided to eligible, or potentially eligible, students with disabilities. And American Indian students with disabilities can also receive pre-employment transition services through the state VR program. And that's an important distinction. Because the state VR program has the statute, and it allows us to set aside money specifically for that. And you don't have that under the tribal program.



WAYNE DAGEL: Correct. The AIVRS projects or tribal VR cannot provide pre-employment transition services. We can provide transition services, which is identified-- and this is going back to the original watch party that we had-- you can provide transition services based off of working-age individuals.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: As we pointed out, transition services can be provided by school or by the state VR and tribal VR all at the same time. And it's really a focus on collaboration with partners to make sure that eligible students receive transition services.

WAYNE DAGEL: And again, with this last one, the focus on collaboration with partners, this takes us right back to our initial discussion of the MOU/MOA-- developing that relationship, developing that partnership. And we identify what's taking place there and the services that are going to be shared across these cases.

And then, when we get to the delivery of transition services, we already have an idea of who's doing what. And we start that partnership and that collaboration at that point in providing those services.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: I think Jamie has her hand up. Jamie?

SPEAKER: Yes, I just wanted to add to that last conversation about the legalities for parents-- Rachel's question. I would suggest also checking with your states if you have a state disability law center, they could provide additional information on legalities for parents of youth with disabilities.

And then, also, Pat Walking Eagle has a question about age requirements. She says that in her state, the age for services is 14. For tribal, it's 16 years. But she was wondering, how would it work for homeless youth? And Fallon says, Pat, where is that in the regs for 16-year-olds?

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Well, let me start with the state age, and then I'll let Wayne talk about the tribal VR programs' age for service. But under WIOA, there is a minimum-- the regulations state that the state VR agency, they can determine what age they will start serving transition services for youth and pre-employment transition services. So it's defined by the state's IDEA regulations, but you can go lower.

So as it was pointed out here, Pat said in her state, state VR is working with students that are as young 14. And we do find that across the country. Some states, it's at 15 or 16. We have, I believe it's Michigan, that even goes up to the age of-- it's, like, 14 to 26. They really got a big age range. Wayne, for tribal?

WAYNE DAGEL: So due to the sovereignty of tribal nations, they can have different ages, also. So when transition services are being looked at, it's working age. That's what's defined. So if your tribe follows the state working age, then it would be that age that you're allowed to start working with them in transition services.

That's why it's so important that we connect and make those connections to the state pre-services. It allows us to have our youth getting services sooner than what tribal VR can provide transition services for.

As far as the homeless piece, you would categorize them as the same as you would the other youth. It's based on their working age and what the state has identified as their service age for pre-employment transition services. Being homeless doesn't have an impact on that, other than they're homeless, and there's more difficulties that follow that side of eligibility and service provision. But they focus on the--

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Actually, they--

WAYNE DAGEL: Oh, go ahead, Christine.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: I was going to say for a youth with a disability, it's defined in the regulations under the state VR program as someone who's between the ages of 14 and 24. But you could be, as you said, you could be homeless, but the question might be, are you still in school? So you could be homeless and in school or homeless and out of school.

So again, great questions. We're not going to have time to go through, probably, all the nuances. But that's why we're going to save this chat. Because that helps us to actually give you more information through other webinars or talking circles.

So actually, now, under WIOA, we now have a full continuum of services that can be provided by vocational rehabilitation, starting with those pre-employment transition services, which now represent the earliest set of services for either potentially eligible or eligible students with disabilities. And again, this is under the state VR program.

They're meant to be short-term in nature, helping these students identify career interests. Think of them as appetizers. They're going to take a couple of bites, get an idea if they like these or not. And they are a specific set of five required activities that have to be provided directly to students with disabilities statewide, to any of them that need it.

This is followed by transition services. And, again, under state VR, on tribal VR, they're available for eligible students with disabilities through an individualized plan for employment. And these are services that help further develop and pursue what their career interests are and what are they going to do after high school.

And that leads right into the employment-related services that we're probably more familiar with because we've served adults for so long. So again, it's like I have a goal. I know exactly what I want to do. I have a specific thing that I'm working for.

And so we're helping you go ahead and prepare for it, secure it, retain it, and advance or regain an employment outcome. Anything you wanted to add with that, Wayne?

WAYNE DAGEL: Just that tribal VR can participate in the last two transition services and employment-related services. And tribal VR programs, through the partnership, can help bring pre-employment transition services into their community by working with the state VR offices.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Excellent. OK. So now, we're going to get to the meat of our presentation, looking at partnerships that allow students and youth to succeed, and how do we develop those working partnerships.

So this is, again, kind of a recap from our first webinar. But it's all about taking that piece of paper, that MOA, and how do you really operationalize it at the ground level, making sure that we try to have positive working relationships with our local schools, our special ed programs, between the state VR and the AIVRS programs and any other adult service providers, such as your Developmental Disabilities Administration, maybe your Workforce Title I programs. What else, Wayne?

WAYNE DAGEL: There's just a lot of the tribal programs that are focused on employment. There's a lot of tribal youth programs that we could bring into this, in collaboration with the adult agency service providers. All of those programs are available tribally. And I think they get overlooked a lot because it's only seen as tribal employees or something like that.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Another important piece is to renew and update that MOA, as we talked about earlier. And that means including transition guidelines, some language about how you're going to serve students and youth. And I think our Arizona folks and Washington folks can definitely talk about that.

But again, it's focusing on that collaboration, so not working in a silo. Let's work together to make sure that these eligible students receive transition services and that we coordinate and communicate so everyone's on the same page.

WAYNE DAGEL: Even the end goal in mind, as you're working, is to get these youth and students with disabilities services. That's the end goal. And we do that through communication, collaboration, putting aside hard feelings or whatever it is that be develop between the projects over history. It's just really important that we keep the students and the youth in mind, that this is the purpose of why we're doing these services.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: All right. So now, next slide. And we're going to hear from our friends in Arizona. So I'm going to ask that Joshua, Abel, Paula, and Traci, you go ahead and unmute and turn on your cameras. And we're going to hear from you guys.

PAULA SEANEZ: [IN NAVAJO] Good morning, As a Navajo woman my clans are: Kint'ichííinii (Red House) nishli; I'm born for To' Aheedííinii (Waters Flowing Together), and my paternal and maternal grandfathers are Áshjijhi (Salt) and Honágháahnii (One Walks Around). This is how I identify myself to all my relations.

I wanted to introduce myself. I'm from Navajo Nation. Of course, I presented my four clans because it's all about relationships. I know a lot of you on the call may be my relatives, so I ask you to reach out after this presentation to also acknowledge who you are.

So we're excited here. Because in Indigenous communities, our children are our future. This topic is dear to our program, our people, because transition is a vision for the future. The Navajo Nation was the first program in Indian country, as the first American Indian Vocational Rehab program. Now there are 94-- not nearly enough, but there are 94 programs across the country.

Since our program was established, there have been many amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, the statute that funds our programs. And it has changed the trajectory of services, putting a focus on transition. American Indian VR programs are developed and funded for a five-year discretionary grant cycle. So our partnership and relationships with the state VR agency is so critical.

Once again, the changes in the Rehab Act has opened up new opportunities for students with disabilities and youth with disabilities. And we want to share with you some of the services that we have developed here on the Navajo Nation for our youth with disabilities.

The Navajo Nation is in a tri-state region-- New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah. Our partnerships with the three states includes our ongoing memorandums of understanding that was spoken about before. So we develop MOUs with the state of Arizona Rehab Services Administration, New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Utah Office of Rehabilitation, as well as New Mexico Commission for the Blind.

I am here with a team of partners in the state of Arizona from the state VR agency, which I will refer to as Arizona RSA, as well as the University of Arizona's Sonoran Center, located in Tucson, Arizona. Providing transition services on a Navajo Nation in a tri-state region can be very complex for us as a VR program.

Education or schools in Indigenous communities on tribal lands are provided by public schools, Bureau of Indian Education-operated schools, Bureau of Indian Education-funded schools-- and those are based on the Self-Determination Act to provide education services in tribal communities-- also, charter schools and private schools. It has been our experience here on the Navajo Nation that the memorandum of understanding is critical to building the foundation between state VR agencies, other state agencies, and the Navajo Nation.

The memorandum of understanding cannot be written and just placed on the shelf and not be implemented. Agreements in Indigenous nations should affirm and uphold our ability to exercise our inherent right to provide services within our jurisdiction and self-governance. The Navajo Nation program was based on that, our ability to provide vocational rehabilitation services to our community members with disabilities based on our language, our culture, and the strengths and resources that come from our communities.

The Navajo Nation has developed transition services and has put this as a priority in our five-year grant and our prior grants, as well. Our collaboration is developed based on several key reasons. Some of those are parents do not have adequate information about how to participate in their child's transition.

They don't know where to go for assistance after high school. And they don't know where to go for assistance on the spectrum, or understanding the spectrum, of education and the employment providers and on the type and level of support that may be offered by providers.

And the key area is understanding what advocacy efforts and resources are available for protecting their child's rights and family support resources. The Navajo Nation has participated with schools over the years by attending outreach, attending and doing presentation at the schools, attending individualized education planning meetings, meeting with parents at parent nights, and so, again, collaborating and developing that relationship with the school.

To formalize our work, Navajo Nation has been a key player in the Arizona community of practice on transition. There's a statewide community of practice on transition. As many of you may be aware, community of practice on transition can refer to the collective or collaborative learning process. So we learn together.

The community of practice includes supports and encouragement from all members. And our focus is on transition. For the Arizona community of practice on transition, we're working to educate others and learn from each other by strengthening the whole group. So again, it's a strength-based approach to working together.

Some of those representatives include developmental disabilities, behavioral health, Arizona Department of Education, and, of course, the vocational rehab agency, Rehab Services Administration, as well as others. Some of our most recent transition work with schools has been expanded to include the University of Arizona Sonoran Center, Arizona RSA, as well as the schools on the Navajo Nation, to provide better access to pre-employment transition services. So in addition, we are collaborating on specifically work-based learning experiences and accessing pre-employment transition services on the Navajo Nation.

Before I turn it over to Traci from the Arizona Rehab Services Administration-- and then, thereafter, Abel will speak regarding the Sonoran Center-- I just want to touch on our efforts in New Mexico. We have a longstanding Project SEARCH initiative that has been occurring in the state of New Mexico. Project SEARCH has a goal to provide real-life work experiences, combined with training in employability and independent living skills, to help young people with significant disabilities make successful transitions to productive adult lives.

The Project SEARCH model involves extensive periods of skill training, career exploration, innovative adaptations, long-term job coaching, and continuous feedback from the teachers that are involved, the skill trainers, and also employers. The hotel we work with in the Gallup community, Gallup Project SEARCH, is the Hilton Gardens. And the interns, as they call them,

complete the training program. And it's for students with significant intellectual disabilities to be employed in nontraditional, complex, and rewarding jobs.

So going forward, we're expanding our Project SEARCH efforts in New Mexico to include Kirtland Central High School, Window Rock High School has also expressed interest in implementing Project SEARCH. And I want to go ahead and turn it over to Traci from Arizona Rehab Services Administration.

TRACI: Thank you, Paula. We are very happy and, as Paula said, we're great partners with our tribal nations through those MOUs and MOAs. And as we look at those, we know that having those set agreements help us to work cooperatively together.

And part of those agreements include us training together. And I think that has been one of those things that, in the past, has been an important part of our agreement to help our staff understand what is available through each party's services makes a huge difference.

I know that, going forward, we need to see more of that happening for our staff so that they are getting more information about those culturally relevant services and being connected with our tribal VR counselors to work cooperatively on those IEPs and IPEs to make those skills and services available to those students.

So some of the things we've seen as being most helpful is, as Paula said, those connections--being connected with the actual tribal VR staff to help talk about those services and being a part of working with students. We see those pre-employment transition services being provided to those students as super important, as starting that career pathway coming forward, and helping them to understand what's available so that they can make those integral decisions about where they're going to go once they transition from high school into a work environment or further education. It provides that support for them.

One of the things we saw was that we typically use a provider agency model. And we noted that when they were reaching out to our tribal partners, they were not as readily available to them. So we wanted to engage other partners to hopefully access those services a little easier.

And that's one of the reasons that we had partnered with the Arizona Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities, to help build capacity in those different tribal nations across the state. So we feel like coordinating with those partners to provide those services on their campus is an important part of those pre-ETS to be more tribally and culturally relevant and to build that capacity in those different areas so that they have those services in place.

To date, we're still looking at what the outcomes will be, as some of these partnerships have just started. But we've seen some good results in some different areas. So we are working with our local staff to help them connect directly with those tribal partners as soon as they are receiving referrals so that they have that background and that information and that cooperative partnership direct from the very beginning when they're working with a student. So those are some of the things we're putting in place to help support our process in working with. We've

also looked at identifying specific counselors to develop those skill sets to work with our tribal partners and learn those cultural differences to help them be more successful in working with those students on a regular basis.

Some of the other things that we've done is work with our transition from school to work partners that are seeing some of those students in some of our programs in the public schools and providing those services directly for transition services, which we've seen a lot of students go on to pursue their employment opportunities from those programs after seeing what they can do and the different opportunities available to them through exploring different work-based learning opportunities and working in different environments.

And I'm going to actually turn it over to Abel to talk a little bit more about our partnership with the Arizona Sonoran Center for Excellence. Abel?

ABEL YOUNG: Thank you, Traci. I'm going to spend a little bit of time talking about our pre-employment transition services partnership we have with Arizona VR. And as always, I thank Arizona VR because without their funding and support, this project wouldn't be possible. So I always like to make that clear.

So as part of our pre-ET services that we offer, it really is focused on work-based learning, specifically. And there's two elements to this project that we do. The biggest aspect is, during the school year, we've been asked to partner with local schools around the state and train those schools through the provision of pre-employment transition services on how to establish their own work-based learning programs that their students can participate in.

So when we partner with a local school, we'll assign them one of our vocational specialists, one of our pre-employment transition services staff. And that staff will provide work-based learning experiences to their students.

And while the student is participating in those work-based learning experiences, the school is providing a school staff that's being trained alongside our vocational specialist on how to do that-- how to develop a relationship with a business out in the community, how to support a student through job coaching during their work experience, how to develop all of the different tools and supports that those students might need to maintain that work experience and be successful in that work experience.

And then once that school is trained, our staff slowly fade out. And then the school has their own sustainable work-based learning program that they can offer as part of their transition services that students receive.

The other piece that we do when school's not in session, during the summer, is we offer a paid summer work program. So this gives students an opportunity to get a summer work experience-- a paid summer work experience, I should say. And again, it gives them a further opportunity to explore other different types of careers that are available, to further develop

their own work readiness skills on the job, and to earn a little bit of money, like many of their peers that don't have disabilities tend to do over the summer.

I think some of the things that we've really seen as part of this project, obviously, there's an increased understanding of our students with disabilities when it comes to work-- what work means, what their expectations are for work-- and, obviously, an increase in their own work skills as a result of them getting some real hands-on work experiences. We've also seen a big increase in parent expectations, which, I think, as we all know, is really, really important as our youth are transitioning out of school.

As part of this project, we provide weekly summaries to our school partners and to parents on the progress their student is making as they're participating in these work experiences, what skills they're developing on a weekly basis, what types of supports we've been using that have worked well for that student at their worksite, and what we plan on working on moving forward to continue to further develop those skills.

So I think parents read those weekly summaries, and they really learn about things that their student can do that they maybe never saw at home before, or even at their school, that they haven't seen their student doing at their school. And it really changes that mindset for parents that their student can work when they graduate school. That should be an expectation. That should be a goal.

I think one thing that's been happening recently-- and we've been building up a partnership with Navajo Nation, specifically with Window Rock High School, which is up in Northern Arizona. And again, I want to thank Paula and Navajo VR. They were really instrumental in getting us connected with Window Rock High School. I think, like Paula mentioned earlier, relationships matter a lot.

And them already having that relationship with the school and introducing us to them really made that partnership possible. But we're going to be starting our work-based learning program up there, working with Window Rock School staff and helping them establish their own work-based learning program moving forward.

When it comes to really taking culturally relevant services into consideration, we've done that with Window Rock by hiring a vocational specialist who's local and lives in that community, someone who understands that community, someone who's from Navajo Nation, so that they can really take those aspects into consideration when services are being provided and will be working with the school and those students and families. Joshua, I know you wanted to share some things, as well.

JOSHUA DRYWATER: Sure. The main thing-- again, my name is Joshua Drywater, and I'm the program manager of Native Initiatives with the Sonoran Center. And I just really wanted to echo what Paula and everyone else has said about the youth really being the future and how key it is for these collaborations to exist to maximize the potential for services for our youth going through transition.



I wanted to talk about a program that I manage. It's the Finds Their Way program that focuses specifically on native transition youth in Arizona. So within the first year of our program, with the help and collaboration of 28 different organizations, including tribal government, state government entities, as well as private sectors that provide services to individuals with disability, as well as resources, we were able to develop what I would say-- an aerial view of the landscape analysis in Arizona.

So it goes a lot with what several of the people have discussed today, that there are, I wouldn't say, a lack of resources. It's really about coming together and maximizing the great things that everyone is doing.

So within the first year, we developed this statewide landscape analysis. And as we transition into the second year, we're going to begin working with Native youth within specific tribal communities and developing regional and local-level landscape analysis, first through tribal youth leadership programs that are able to capture the Tribal Youth voice, and then working with them as they go through the transition process and what exact services are happening, what some of the barriers could be.

Because as we found out, oftentimes, we can talk about some of the disparities or challenges that are happening. But I also want to be able to highlight some of the amazing things that the tribal communities are doing, as Paula mentioned, with the great success they've had. And I think these best practices models really are a way of showing how the collaborative work and the partnership can really maximize the benefits for our youth.

TRACI: Abel, there was a question in the chat. They were asking if a person has line of sight, would the Sonoran UCEDD program work for them?

ABEL YOUNG: Yeah, I was just typing a response in the chat, Traci, but thank you. I'll just read what I was going to type, and I can delete it. So we work with any student with any type of a disability that has been identified by our school partner that will be a part of their work-based learning program.

So it's generally the school that is identifying, maybe, a certain classroom or a specific group of students that they want to target to be a part of their work-based learning program that we're developing. We tend to see students more so with developmental disabilities, cognitive or intellectual disabilities. That tends to be the focus. But we will work with any student that the school is asking us to.

PAULA SEANEZ: Christine, I think that that rounds up our initiatives in Arizona. I know Jamie has her hand up. However, we also do want to leave time for our folks from Washington.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: All right. Jamie?

SPEAKER: I just raised my hand to say, in order to hear from all of our presenters, if we could just keep our questions in the chat till the end, that way everyone will have time to present their information. Sorry. I didn't know if everyone saw that in the chat.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Thank you. All right. Thank you very much, Arizona. All right. We're going to hear now from our friends in Washington state as they talk about their two programs and how they started their relationship and how they serve mutual consumers. So Christopher and Donna, I'll let you go ahead. Take it away.

CHRISTOPHER ZILAR: Great. So my name is Christopher. I work for Spokane Tribe of Indians, and I love my job. I'm the director of vocational rehabilitation, as you can see there on the screen.

Donna and I know each other pretty well. Donna works for the state. I'll let her explain more. But I'll say Donna actually comes to our office once a month and holds office hours here, which makes it easier for us to refer people to the state program.

And that has been a real help for us because, over time, we anticipate that Donna's face will be recognized in our community. And it does take time to develop some level of trust inside our small community here. And so there'll be a day when I think there'll be people requesting to see Donna personally.

A comment that I wanted to make around the memorandums of understanding has to do with how it looked like in our state some years back. So when I was new, basically, we met on an annual basis-- we being the directors of tribal vocational rehabilitation programs-- with state leadership. And we would revise our plan. And that would be the end of it. And we'd put the piece of paper away and wouldn't do much with it other than that.

And there was a very passionate plea from a couple of other directors. Some of you might know Shari Parker, also known as Shari Hughes, or Jana Finkbonner, both of whom were saying that those of us who were tribal vocational rehabilitation directors needed to be a little more present in those meetings.

And so we had a year where all of the different directors showed up. And we pleaded with the state, hey, we really do need to have more shared cases. We need to have a better way of making sure this MOU actually is useful.

And from that point to where we're at now is dramatically different. At the time, I think, across the state, there were a few shared cases between tribal voc rehab programs and the state's program. But now every program has multiple shared cases.

In addition to that, the tribes are offered a place at the table when there's a leadership role that is being interviewed for. And so that would be at the state level. Anybody who is going to be interviewed for a director or assistant director or a tribal liaison representative or anything like that, we get offered a place at the table to be part of that interview process.

Here, in our local area, we get offers to sit in on interviews, as well, when there is a voc rehab counselor or a rehab tech or a tribal liaison being interviewed for any of those entry-level-type jobs. So those are all really remarkable advances.

I think the other thing that we've got that is probably the best thing we've got so far is we actually have in our MOU a description of what it means to be a tribal liaison between the state and the tribal programs. And that really helps all of us understand what the liaisons are really supposed to be doing.

And that's what Donna does. She works for the state. She has worked in the tribal system before. And I'll let Donna speak to her side.

DONNA ADAMSON: Great. Thank you, Christopher. And I'm not feeling all that great, so forgive me. But I really wanted to say thank you to all those who joined us from Arizona because it's such an inspiration to see what's really working out there.

I feel like, in Washington State, we're a few steps behind, but we're getting there. And there are some things that are working. Like Christopher said, meeting in person, having the state liaison meeting in person at your tribal voc rehab agencies, is so pivotal.

And I saw Keith Tampkins is in here. And he's the first counselor I ever talked with who did that. And that really spoke to me. And it does work. So we do one-time-- as the tribal liaison, I meet one time a month with each tribe that I'm a liaison for. And then, also, we meet virtually. And it seems like the in-person times when I'm there at the tribes are more for intakes and collaboration and brainstorming. But also, those virtual ones, it seems like are a really great format for talking about what's upcoming in terms of events and doing some more planning.

So in some of the more recent virtual ones, we've been talking about-- I've been sharing all the high school outreach that I've been doing. And we're making the plans for the tribal counselors who can come with to do that outreach. So at least one time a year, I will reach out to all the high schools that I'm responsible for to let them know who I am, let them know what kind of services that I provide. And so I have a general flyer that's been really helpful, and then I get quite a response back.

So I'm a counselor out of Colville, Washington, in the Northeast corner of Washington. And I cover three counties. It's quite a lot of high schools. And there's a lot of overlap with the tribal VR agencies too. So we are collaborating for that outreach, and then when I get all that follow-up, making plans to go together to the high schools for intakes or things like, gosh, a family night-- it's a pretty common one-- and other kinds of events that are going on at the high schools.

There's also-- I love to talk about partnerships because there's some really great agencies, I'm sure, in all of your states that you could be partnering with to make sure that we get as comprehensive services as possible for our youth. And I know there's mention of

Developmental Disabilities Administration. And that's called many different things in different states.

And here in Washington, too, we have a resource called Foundational Community Supports. So if somebody has a mental health diagnosis or disability, they can get access to resources for benefits and housing. There was a mention about, what if my youth is homeless? Well, we have this great resource in Washington that we can utilize. And there's a lot of other programs too.

And so I guess I'll keep it kind of short. But this is just the beginning for Washington State. And I've only been with the state for a little over a year. So I'm still learning all about how there's the pre-ETS part, where the state comes in and collaborates with high schools to provide students the foundational little morsels of education and growing into their adult selves.

And then I, as the counselor, do the one on one with individuals who want more support through the VR, and the same with the tribal VR. I really don't feel that great. Otherwise-- I think I'll stop myself there.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Thank you so much, Donna. I really appreciate the fact that you are a real trouper, not feeling well, but you joined us anyway. So I do have a question, though. Christopher, maybe you can speak to this. Can you talk about serving mutual consumers? How does that work? Does your program reach out, or do you have regular meetings to say, hey, I've got someone I think we can refer?

CHRISTOPHER ZILAR: Yeah. So one of the things that we did early on-- early on for me, I should say-- is that we started asking the state to track, actually, how many people were self-identified as Native American or Alaskan Native, and then how many of those would be in a planned state, or were on the wait list due to being in order of selection. And it was pretty remarkable to see the number of people who had self-identified as Native American who were sitting in a waitlist and who had not been referred to a tribal voc rehab program.

So that was a strong statement back at that time to say, look, you have all these people-- like for us, when we asked for that the first time, our program, specifically, there were something like 35 or 40 people who were self-identified as Native American on a wait list, had not been referred to our program and resided in our service area. And that's not including all of the other many tribal vocal rehab programs.

So that started a process where we said, we need to have something a little more formal in place and more passion about making sure we're sharing cases when we can. We've had a few stops and starts a couple of times. But basically, at this point now, I'd say half of the cases we have that are shared were cases where the state referred someone to us.

Up to that point, any cases that we had shared were because we recognized someone needed extra services that we could not afford, and we reached out to the state and shared the case for that reason. So it's nice to have the state recognize that they can share cases with us and that there's a benefit to their clients for doing that.

And that's what we've really been looking for all along is that there's a mutual respect and mutual understanding that everything is in the best interest of our clients. And the clients will be better served if they get the services of multiple agencies.

So how does it actually work? Well, for me, in our program, we specifically ask our clients if they would like to also apply for the state program. Generally speaking, people don't understand it well enough, or they're scared of it, or they don't really see what they could have beyond what we have to offer. And they would typically say, I'm fine right where I'm at.

So it does take some knowledge on the counselor's part to see, hey, the state really could do X, Y, and Z that are beyond our capacity. And I really think that this is important part of your process.

It will help increase the chance that you're going to succeed in this employment goal, et cetera. So that takes some doing. The counselors have to become acquainted with the state and then recognize that there's value in that.

And that's one of the reasons why it's really great for us to have Donna in our office. Because the counselors get to meet her and actually get to know what she's there to do. And it does help, I have to admit, that Donna has worked for the tribal voc rehab world, as well. So she has an understanding of both sides, which is really helpful.

And beyond that, I personally make sure I go out and I meet with some of our liaisons. I go meet with our state partners. And that makes it easier for them to refer to us, as well. So we have-- I think we have something like 10 of our cases right now that are shared with the state. So does that answer your question, Jamie?

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Oh, that's excellent. You answered it. You went beyond. I think you've really touched on some important things-- having the state VR, on a regular basis, look at their data, look at their populations. Like you said, they saw these people who identified as Native American, and they were on a waiting list.

So even if a state didn't have an order-- didn't have to be in an order of selection, that's still a good practice, to look and see, maybe this would be a benefit. If we have a tribal VR program in the state, or several of them, we can refer to them.

And then I think the other thing is having that on a regular basis, Donna shows up. And I can remember myself being a counselor and trying to establish a relationship with some community providers. Oftentimes, I went once a week. They may not have someone for me to see. But the fact that I show up-- everyone saw me, they got to know me, and the referrals came.

So it is about starting that relationship, talking with people, and being able to-- that's exactly how the partnership and relationship and respect happens. It's just being there and showing up. So that was just spot on.

I really thank all of our presenters today. This is really great. Any questions, Jamie, that we have in the chat?

SPEAKER: Hold on just one second. I'm trying to get back up to where we dropped off. I think we already answered the line of sight question that Karen posted. I'm sorry. That was Fallon that asked about the line of sight.

Karen Russell said, wow, for us, we always refer consumers who are Native American, whether we had a wait list or not. In fact, I had a consumer who was in a welfare program that we were able to refer to tribal VR so that his welfare benefits were not compromised with him being in a vocational program required by welfare at that time. I'm not sure-- and then Abel, of course, said, thank you, Christine, for including us.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: All right. This is some resources that we have. The first one is, again, a side-by-side view of transition services that actually shows you what it's like under education, under state VR, and under tribal VR.

The next resource, Transition Tennessee, is a website put together by a number of entities in Tennessee strictly on transition. So you can see what is transition, what are transition services, what curriculum would I be able to provide to students and youth with disabilities. So again, check it out.

And then, of course, our individual technical assistance centers are listed here. And of course, go to the AIVRTTAC website Technical Assistance Center, where you can view the map of where all of the tribal programs are. I know I get a lot of questions from people that said, I don't know if I have a tribal VR program in my state. And their website will let you know.

And again, we have question-- how will we have access to those resources? This PowerPoint and a PDF are also listed on the CIT-VR website, the same site where you registered the link.

And I just want to be able to thank everyone who worked so hard together just to put this together. I will be posting everyone's email in the chat. And you can save the chat and get in contact with us if you have questions going forth.

In the chat, we also have the evaluation link. Again, whether you need CRC credits or not, please, fill out the evaluation. Let us know if this was useful. What else would you like to see? What else do you need to know more about? And the landing page for training is also there. Wayne, any parting comments?

WAYNE DAGEL: The only thing I want to reiterate again is the MOU/MOA partnership process, that we have to develop the MOU through this partnership and keep it a living, breathing document to get services to these youth and students with disabilities. It's so important for our projects to work together.

And I really appreciate this opportunity to present with you and facilitate this webinar. Thank you for that. And thanks for everybody attending.

CHRISTINE JOHNSON: Yes, thank you, everyone. Have a great day, and enjoy the rest of the week. We really appreciate your attendance today. See you again soon.