

Addressing Recruitment and Retention in VR

Pilot Project

John Walsh (JW): All right. So that's kind of a global picture. That's some of the global research that is occurring by the Gallup organization that kind of sets the stage. Let's go down a little bit more locally in our own space within the public VR system. In response to this crisis, we at the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management launched a pilot project in fiscal year 2022 in collaborations with the Operations and Personnel Committee of CSAVR. And in this pilot project, we worked with four state VR agencies in developing customized strategy to address the unique issues of recruitment and retention within their organizations. As a matter of fact, today, one of the directors from an agency in the pilot project, Melinda from Oklahoma, has joined us today to talk about some of the things they've implemented within their organization. So I'm going to go through this pretty quickly.

JW: We basically had a framework in this pilot project that looked at using a guided assessment to really gather information about the current state of the organization. This was through, we sent out an extensive guided assessment tool. We gathered key documents from the organization to learn about attrition rates, compensation, how people classify different roles within their organization. We looked at parts of the state plan. And then we did a few live sessions with the leadership team of these organizations to gather this information. Based on that guided assessment, we then developed a work plan. The first thing we did, though, is we took the results of what we heard in that assessment. We gathered again with the leadership team of the organization and said, "Did we hear this correctly? Are we getting this correct?" And once we were on the same page of identifying some of the root causes related to recruitment and retention issues, then we proceeded to create a customized work plan for each of the agencies. We then, our team, then provided coaching. And then we also set up evaluation standards to measure how we're making progress and what are some of the outcomes we had hoped to achieve.

JW: So, the guided assessment tool that we developed for QM is available to anyone. On the slide I have up currently, in the upper right-hand corner, it says the VRTAC-QM guided assessment tool that actually contains a URL that will take you to a Microsoft Word document. And you could utilize that tool yourself if you wanted to do some assessment around recruitment and retention issues within your organization. There are so many factors we looked at. We looked at the political environment. We did an environmental scan, the organization of the designated state agency and the designated state unit. What were some of the issues with the collective bargaining units? What were your relationships with the universities, with rehab counseling programs in your state? What are some of your practices around salary and classifications, current recruitment and retention practices? Are you doing some creative staffing practices, caseload sizes? What are your advancement opportunities? How are you using modern technology? Location, including remote work. Do you do any streamlining of your processes or do you have any mechanisms in place to do that? Do you have staff recognition? What's your leadership training look like? How do you deal with input

and feedback from your staff and what does your overall culture look like within your organization?

JW: So I'm going to cut to the chase to this. When we looked at these four states and gathered the data and developed work plans, there were a couple of recommendations that emerged from this pilot project. First of all, it's important to dedicate resources, both internally to your organization and externally, really to that recruitment process. Some people, they dedicated to bring on a full-time recruitment staff person that that was their full-time job, is just getting out there and doing that recruitment piece. If you don't have a hybrid work policy, I'd really advise you to look at it. It seems to be a pretty critical factor right now. Now, I also get the point that not every state entity can do hybrid work based on the direction from the governor or the current administration. I totally get that. But it's one of those pieces that we have to look at and want to provide convincing evidence that perhaps it's time to start taking a look at it. We also know that many states struggle with salary or compensation plans not being competitive. Do you have a plan that you would implement in order to change that situation, including gathering data about what folks in similar positions are making within the state, both in the nonprofit and the public sector? Maybe it's a time to review your position requirements and update them where needed. Some of them can be impediments to bringing folks on. The other piece is having that kind of learning organization where there's multiple avenues for professional growth for folks. This seems to be a pretty doable feature within state VR agencies. That can really enhance that employee engagement. The other piece is, are you actually assessing your level of employment engagement? Do you do employee engagement surveys? Or do you do stay interviews where you're trying to assess why people stay? Or why are they considering leaving? Do your managers have meaningful conversation with folks that doesn't necessarily connect with a performance review, but just for checking in, hey, how are you doing? How are things going with your workload? What are some of the resources you need? The other piece is we see that utilizing change teams for process improvement can be a real value added for your organization to improve those processes, both for the internal customer and your external customer to ensure work tasks are as easy as they can be and that we're getting rid of unnecessary work that if we got rid of them, maybe nobody would even notice that they were gone.

JW: We also want to make you aware that based on the pilot project, we developed a really extensive website to pull together resources that you can use, including examples of employee engagement surveys, examples of stay interviews from state agencies that we're using, some books, one called *The Power of Stay Interviews* by Richard Finnegan, which was published by the Society of Human Resource Managers. Easy Read, but will give you a really quick introduction to the whole concept of stay interviews. We also posted the CSAVR salary repository to see what other VR counselors are making at other state agencies. We also performed a national survey to look at what other state VR agencies are doing around recruitment. CSAVR and their human resource professional network sent this out, and we've got a lot of great responses of really some creative things that folks are doing to publish their vacancies, including using various social media platforms. I would highly suggest you check it out to see some of those resources that are there. We also put together a list because we've heard that we're having problems recruiting from universities. We put together a list of CACREP accredited programs and rehabilitation counseling, and we link them with RSA long-term training programs or the RSA scholars programs that provides financial support for individuals to receive their master's degree in and rehabilitation counseling. As a matter of fact, our team

at GW just updated this list last month, so it's up to date. Please avail yourself of it. We've also given you examples of what other state agencies are doing to increase recruitment and retention, including the use of stay bonuses, and we've also compiled a list of some relevant articles that will help you in your journey. Now, to access these resources, we've embedded a link in this slide. I also put a QR code on the screen so that you can access these resources in that way.