

Effectiveness of a Business Development Training for Rehabilitation Counselors who Work with Consumers Who are Blind or Visually Impaired

What Were We Trying to Learn?

An important part of VR counselors' jobs is working with businesses to identify jobs for consumers who are blind or visually impaired (B/VI). However, many counselors are uncomfortable interacting with businesses.

To help address this problem, the NRTC developed a training program for VR counselors who work with consumers who are B/VI. This training focuses on business development, which is the part of a counselor's job that involves working with employers to find jobs for consumers.

We wanted to know if this training program could improve counselors' confidence, skills, and knowledge when it comes to working with businesses.

What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

Before participating in the training, we surveyed counselors about business development. We found that:

- **Business development is a big part of counselors' jobs.** Over 80% said they were expected to do business development as part of their job. More than a third of counselors said they spent at least 25% of their worktime on business development.
- **Business development is highly encouraged by VR agencies but not always well-supported.** Almost three-quarters of counselors said their agencies provided at least a medium amount of encouragement for business development. However, just 58% said their agencies provided at least a medium amount of support for business development. This gap may indicate an area for improvement for VR agencies.
- **Counselors want more training in business development.** Counselors understood the importance of business development. Over 90% said they would benefit from more training in business development.

Research Takeaway

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors know that working with businesses is an important part of their job, but many lack confidence in their ability to do this task. We found that a training program we created increased counselors' short-term confidence, skills, and knowledge when it comes to working with businesses.

After participating in the training, we surveyed counselors again. We found that counselors who did the training had higher confidence (self-efficacy) and knowledge related to business development. They also self-reported higher comfort levels, skills, and knowledge related to working with businesses. These results indicate that our training program is effective in the short-term. More research will be needed to discover the long-term effects of the training.

How Do These Findings Relate to Me?

- **Business development should be part of the curricula in rehabilitation counseling master's programs.** Too many graduates are joining the VR field with little knowledge of business development. Early training in these skills could improve counselors' confidence in working with employers.

- **In addition to encouraging business development, VR agencies should also make sure they support counselors in these tasks.** As agencies encourage business development, they must make sure counselors have the tools and time they need to successfully meet these goals.
- **Counselor supervisors should take a bigger role in supporting business development.** Counselors reported that their agencies were more supportive of business development than their individual supervisors. Supervisors can play an important role in modeling effective business development and mentoring counselors learning about the process.
- **VR agencies should offer business-development training and professional development for counselors.** Large majorities of counselors said they wanted training in business development. They also lacked confidence in their ability to do this important part of their job. VR agencies should offer regular trainings to ensure counselors are equipped for business development.

How Was This Project Carried Out?

Eighty VR counselors and counselor supervisors from four VR agencies that serve B/VI consumers (separate agencies) participated. Participants took an online survey before starting the training.

The training took 19 hours and focused on working with businesses on employment for consumers who are B/VI. The training content was based on a business-development curriculum used by an existing VR agency and results from an NRTC study on VR agency-employer interactions and employer attitudes toward workers who are B/VI. It included topics such as using existing skills to work with employers, building relationships with employers, addressing employer concerns about hiring a worker who is B/VI, and following-up with employers.

After the training, counselors were tested again to measure changes in their business-development confidence, knowledge, and skills.

Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

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For more information about this project, visit the project overview page: The Effectiveness of an Evidence-Based Approach to Rehabilitation Counselor Training on Working With Businesses.

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