



VRS Community Partners + VRS Staff Forum

October 3, 2023

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Housekeeping

- Welcome to the VRS Community Partners + VRS Staff Forum.
- **ASL Interpreters** are designated as “co-hosts”, so they appear at the top of your participant list. If you need ability to “multi-pin” please email jessica.outhwaite@state.mn.us.
- **Closed Captioning** is available. A livestream is linked in the chat.
- **Your name:** Please change the name that Zoom displays to your first and last name. An easy way to rename is: 1) go to the participant list and find your name, 2) hover over your name, 3) select “more,” 4) select “rename.”
- **Questions and Comments:** Please submit feedback, questions, and comments via Microsoft Form: [Q&A Microsoft Form](#)
- **Technical Issues:** If you have technical issues, please contact jessica.outhwaite@state.mn.us.
- **Recording:** The session will be recorded and posted to the VRS website along with the agenda, presentation, and transcript.

Agenda

- **Welcome:** Lori Thorpe, Director of Contracts & Partnerships
- **Extended Employment:** Meghan Hanson, EE Program Specialist, and Nate Lotton, MRCl, Chelsea Garvin, Lifeworks, Kassia Janezich, Tasks Unlimited, and Jackie Siepker, HCVSP.
- **Contracted Services & RFP Review Workgroup:** Janeen Oien, Contracts & Partnerships Program Specialist
- **Q&A:** Janeen Oien, Contracts & Partnerships Program Specialist
- **Wrap Up:** Lori Thorpe, Director of Contracts & Partnerships

Extended Employment Program - 101

Extended Employment Team



- Lori Thorpe, Director
Lori.Thorpe@state.mn.us



- Meghan Hanson, Extended Employment Program Specialist
Meghan.Hanson@state.mn.us

What is Extended Employment?

The Extended Employment Program provides long-term job supports to help Minnesotans with significant disabilities to keep jobs once they have them and advance in their careers.



Extended Employment Overview

- State Funded: \$18.325 million per year
- About 2,840 people participated in SFY22, earning more than \$34.3 million in annual wages.
- Services are provided by 26 community rehabilitation programs.

EE Support Services

- Training
- Retraining job tasks
- Dealing with schedule changes
- Adjusting to new supervisors
- Advancing to new job tasks or positions
- Managing changes in life that effect work performance



Types of Employment

Supported Employment

- Competitive, Integrated Employment

Community Employment

- Work crews, enclaves

Center-Based Employment

- Work done at the provider site
- Center-Based Employment will be phased out by 2026

Supported Employment

- Competitive and integrated employment
- How are supports provided?
- Are supports time limited?

Community Employment

- What is Community Employment?
- When is Community Employment a good fit?
- Transition- Community to Supported

Who should be referred to EE?

Need:

EE is a voluntary service based on an individual's needs for support services in order to maintain, retain, and advance in their employment. Services can last for as long as someone needs them. CRPs do an annual assessment of need and goals.

Eligibility:

- Documentation of diagnosed disability by qualified professional
- Documentation of 3 or more functional limitations
- Individual cannot receive waiver funding

Beginning EE Services

- EE should be discussed at a PBA intake.
- EE employment support services can begin as soon as someone starts a job.
- Individuals can be referred outside of an open file with VRS.

Requirements of EE

- Individuals must be willing to:
 - Meet with the provider at least twice per month
 - Submit copies of all of their paystubs to the provider
 - Work with the provider to develop an Annual Support Plan

VRS PBAs and PT Contracts

- There is not a funding conflict with any of the PBA milestones or other VRS approved services. Both EE and contracted VRS services can be provided at the same time.
- Intake fee - only if it is a brand-new referral

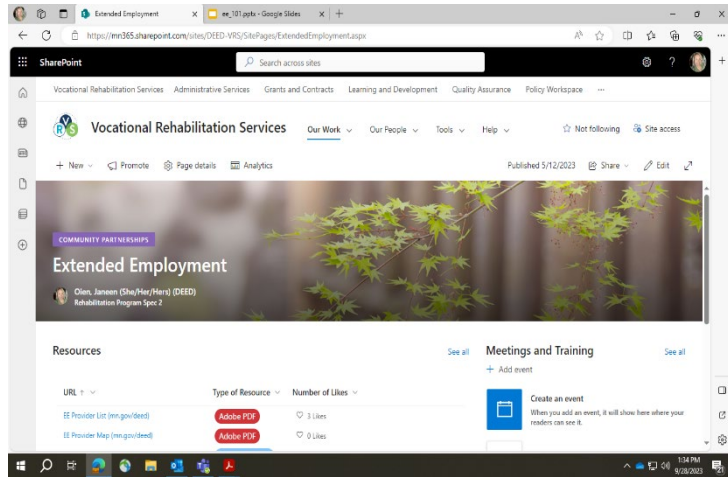
Success Stories

Julie began working with an Extended Employment provider to give her additional supports to accommodate her learning disability and anxiety. Julie reports that EE has been a phenomenal help at providing support needed to manage her anxiety by giving her someone to talk through work concerns with as they come up. Julie also found it helpful to have support around her learning and language disability without which she does not believe she would have had the same opportunities for raises and bonuses.

Success Stories, cont.

Kevin began working with an Extended Employment provider after being referred by his addiction treatment program. Kevin accepted a part-time job as a Vet Tech after completing the training for this field. Kevin worked with his EE provider to establish goals of keeping his job, learning the tasks required of him including tasks on the computer which was a struggle for him, and to sustain his physical and mental health. Kevin met with his EE provider on an on-going basis. Over the course of a year and a half, Kevin utilized his supports to develop strategies for learning his tasks on the computer, strategies for managing his work-flow, and support in navigating conflicts with co-workers and supervisors as they came up periodically. Kevin was eventually able to move to working full-time in his position and has increased his self-sufficiency and maintained employment for the last two years after experiencing years of struggles with retaining employment.

Resources for VR Staff



External Web:

[Extended Employment - Long-Term Job Supports / Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development \(mn.gov\)](https://www.mn.gov/deed/extended-employment)

VRS SharePoint Counselor Resources:

[Extended Employment \(sharepoint.com\)](https://www.sharepoint.com/ExtendedEmployment.aspx)

Contracted Services & RFP Review Workgroup

Historically the bulk of contracted services are reviewed during the months leading up to a new Request for Proposal (RFP) and contracting cycle. This was done as it is a convenient time to make changes to the Professional/Technical contract template and to do any updates to the contracts. The Regional Directors and Executive Leadership Team have served as the de facto contracted services and RFP review workgroup and approval body.

This has been effective, yet comes with some drawbacks:

- Pressurized timeline
- Lack of advance notice/transparency
- Missing opportunities to get feedback from all stakeholders

CSRFPWG purpose

- The primary purpose of the Contracted Services & RFP Review Workgroup will be to review all contracted services on an ongoing timeline, allowing for ample research, solicitation of feedback, and review.
- The VRS Contracted Services & RFP Review Workgroup will serve to provide a forum for obtaining input from VRS staff at all levels in the consideration and development of VRS Contracted Services Review & RFP Workgroup materials.
- The VRS Contracted Services & RFP Review Workgroup will identify, analyze, and discuss key topics and issues effecting VRS services.

In Scope:

- The VRS Contracted Services & RFP Review Workgroup will focus its work on the consideration of issues and factors effecting VRS and its contracted services provided through Professional/Technical contracts, as outlined in the Request for Proposal. It will also focus on the development of contracted services definitions for utilization by both VR and Community Partner staff.

Out of scope:

- The VRS Contracted Services & RFP Review Workgroup will not work on updates to Policy and Guidance. The VRS Contracted Services & RFP Review Workgroup will not work on Contract Monitoring and Compliance.

Quarterly Review Cycles:

First 6 weeks of each quarter will include:

- CP Program Specialists will host listening sessions for Community Partners
- Workgroup reviews existing definitions and billing requirements
- Workgroup members work to gather feedback from their peers across VRS
- Consultations with State Services for the Blind (SSB), Administrative and Fiscal Services (AFS), and Policy specialists
- Research rate-setting guidance from RSA and other sources

Quarterly Review Cycles:

- Second 6 weeks of each quarter will include:
 - Drafting any updates to existing definitions and recommended rate range for future contract/amendment cycles
 - Drafting billing guidance and creating sample invoices and reports
 - Soliciting feedback from various Senior Leaders within VRS and refining drafts
 - Presenting final draft to Deputy Directors and Director of VRS for final approval

CSRFPWG Team

- This workgroup will be made up of VRS staff from a variety of positions and locations across the agency, and members will serve a 2-year term.
- Invitations have been sent out to the selected members for the inaugural workgroup, and this first group will help test and streamline the process to be most effective for this scope of work.
- Members will be announced in an email communication coming out soon!

Discussion – Questions and Answers

Please submit questions and comments using the Microsoft Form linked in the chat and listed below.

[MS Form for Q&A](#)



Thank You!



We'd love to hear your feedback on our VRS Community Partner + VRS Staff Forums.

Please provide your thoughts in the Microsoft Form below. The forum feedback questions are at the end of the form.

[MS Form for Q&A and Forum Feedback](#)

Funding Notice

The VR program receives 78.7 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2022, the total amount of grant funds is \$44,081,347. The required state match for these funds is \$11,930,529 (21.3 percent). The state of Minnesota has appropriated \$14.3 million to exceed the matching requirement.