

Evaluation of the Impact of Pilot Projects on State VR Agencies' Delivery Systems

5th Annual Summit
VR Program Evaluation & Quality Assurance
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Session Objectives

- Share methods used to evaluate Southeast TACE pilot projects designed to introduce effective practices to VR systems.
- Present protocols used to evaluate impact.
- Review preliminary findings.

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Overview

- Since late 2009, Southeast TACE has partnered with state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to integrate innovative practices within the VR service delivery mainstream.
- Several southeast states are piloting or integrating approaches, e.g., Customized Employment and Asset Development

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Overview, cont.

- Five "Innovations Projects" are at a point where impact can be assessed to inform future local, state, regional action.
- TACE and project team members evaluated individual project experiences & the overall Innovations initiative.
- Eval. focus = **impact** on adoption of effective practices by VR systems in the Southeast.

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Overview, cont.

- Eval. findings
 - VRCs in these 4 states have a viable option to serve jobseekers with most significant disabilities, where previously they had no effective option.
 - Results directly attributable to Innovations projects.
 - Value of investment evidenced in...
 - States' further strategies to fully adopt the practice
 - Refinements/Evolution of the practice itself
 - Continuous improvement of the Innovations initiative

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BACKGROUND ON SE TACE'S "INNOVATIONS INITIATIVE"

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Background: Southeast Region

- Largest region in no. of counselors and CRPs
- VR criticized by DD and MH agencies for lack of effectiveness in working with individuals with most significant disabilities
- Traditional models of assessment and job development ineffective with MSD population
- Some agencies dabbled in Customized Employment unsuccessfully in the past

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Background: Goal of Innovations initiative

Increase the capacity of
state agencies & their community partners
to improve employment & self-sufficiency
outcomes
for individuals with
the most significant disabilities

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Background: **Premise of the Innovations initiative**

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- VR system has poor outcomes & limited strategies for serving individuals with the most significant disabilities.
- It takes change in systems and practice to build this capacity.
- Our experience is that isolated trainings, or mass edicts, do not work.
- Hypothesis is you will get more traction with a phased, systems change approach.

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Background: **Premise of the Innovations initiative, cont.**

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- Phased strategy
 - Provides an incubator to understand & address feasibility and systems implications before taking it to scale.
 - Allows the agency to try the practice out, get their feet wet, make it their own, get buy-in.
 - Builds credibility at administrative and service delivery levels because they have experienced & influenced the process.

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Background: **Innovations process**

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- Meet with agency leadership/staff re. goals, success measures, strategy
- Develop concept paper
- Assign project manager
- Develop project scope and plan
- Identify partners/resources
- Choose pilot sites (usually 2 or 3)

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Background: **Innovations process, cont.**

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- Conduct performance-based training
 - Teams of VR agency staff and partners
 - Jobseekers
- Facilitate partnerships and infrastructure supports
- Evaluate pilot phase
- Develop plan for expansion/sustainability/integration

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Background:Practices Customized Employment

US/DOL:

Customized employment means **individualizing the employment relationship** between employees and employers in ways that meet the **needs of both**.

It is based on an individualized determination of the **strengths, needs, and interests** of the person with a disability, and is also designed to meet the specific needs of the employer.



Background:Practices Customized Employment, cont.

Customized Employment process:

- Discovery of the job seeker
- Capturing discovery through profiles
- Customized Employment planning
- Portfolio/visual resume development
- Job development and negotiation
- Job site analysis, accommodations, support



Background:Practices Asset Development

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- 1/3 of adults with disabilities live in households with total income \$15,000 or less.
- >65 % of individuals in poverty for 36 months or more during a 48-month period have a disability.
- The poverty rate among people with disabilities is increasing relative to that of working-age people without work limitations.

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Background:Practices Asset Development, cont.

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- Emphasis on helping families exit poverty through asset building rather than monthly income supports (e.g., cash payments).
- This approach is about encouraging people to save money and to make investments that increase in value over time.
- The assumption is that as individuals develop assets, they and their families will be able to move out of and remain out of poverty.

[Source: Assets for Independence]

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Background: Current status of Innovations initiative

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- 6 Southeast states
- 8 state agencies
- 11 projects in various stages of design or implementation, focused on...
 - Aspects of Customized Employment (8)
 - Asset Development (2)
 - VR Quality Indicators (1)
- 5 have completed a pilot & are considering/ implementing further adoption strategies.

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Background: Description of Pilots

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- Florida
 - Customized Employment – Transition
 - VR, School System, CRPs
 - Discovery Certification
 - Performance-based online credentialing process
 - Discovery – FL DBS Residential Rehabilitation Ctr
- Mississippi
 - Customized Employment – Adult
 - Integration into agency service delivery system

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Background: Description of Pilots, cont.

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- Georgia
 - Customized Employment – Transition and Adult
 - Multi-partner approach
 - Discovery – Residential Rehabilitation Center
- Kentucky
 - Customized Employment – Adult
 - VR and CRPs
 - Asset Development
 - Integration with Customized Employment

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Background: Description of Pilots, cont.

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- North Carolina
 - Asset Development
 - Partnerships
 - VR Training
 - Customized Employment – Transition
- South Carolina
 - VR Quality Indicators

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EVALUATION DESIGN & PROCESS

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Evaluation Purposes

- To assess the impact of the Innovations initiative on VR adoption of emerging employment practices in order to improve outcomes for jobseekers with the most significant disabilities:
 - Identifying appropriate practice
 - Testing it out in the VR context
 - Evaluating results
 - Expanding/Replicating/Integrating

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Evaluation Purposes, cont.

- To continuously improve the Southeast TACE Innovations approach
 - Methods
 - Process
 - Protocols/Tools
 - Resources
 - Ongoing evaluation
- To develop a resource library supporting dissemination & replication in the Southeast

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Evaluation Design Principles

- Demonstrate value of Innovations approach to support adoption of emerging practices.
- Assess impact to date of individual projects and initiative as a whole.
- Directly connect results with the intervention.
- Establish process/protocols for ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement.

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Evaluation Design

- Targets
 - Outputs
 - Trainings conducted, numbers trained
 - Meetings facilitated
 - Models/Curricula/Reports produced
 - Impact
 - Change in attitude/behavior, i.e., awareness/understanding/utilization of the practice
 - Systems changes, e.g., partnerships and infrastructure measures to operationalize the practice

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Evaluation Design, cont.

- Targets, cont.
 - Return on investment: Start-up & operational costs, value-added
 - Customer satisfaction: Agency/Partner assessment of the project experience & the quality of TACE services
 - Jobseeker outcomes
 - Completed profiles
 - Job placements

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Evaluation Design, cont.

- Subjects: Projects that have...
 - Completed the pilot or training phase (at least), and
 - Taken or are considering measures to ramp up
- Types of data
 - Quantitative (trainings conducted, # participants, active practitioners, etc.)
 - Qualitative (partnerships & infrastructure, attitudes & behavior)

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Evaluation Design, cont.

- Data sources
 - Reports & other documentation (communications, products, etc.)
 - Southeast TACE team (staff & consultants involved in development of the initiative, design and execution of projects, etc.)
 - Agency leadership
 - Project leads & participants (incl. jobseekers and their families)

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Evaluation Process

- Design evaluation strategy & agree on measures with input from TACE team, agencies & projects.
- Develop workplan (eval. steps and schedule).
- Design data collection & interview protocol
 - Source documents
 - Key informant interviews
 - Focus group
- Collect/Analyze prelim. data

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Evaluation Process, cont.

- Draft/Revise individual project reports
- Compile/Disseminate aggregate discussion paper
- Conduct focus group among project leads.
- Synthesize findings from all eval. activities.
- Draft/Disseminate white paper summarizing findings and recommendations.
- Revise white paper based on comments from TACE team, agency leaders, project teams.

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Documentation of findings

- Individual project reports for local teams to use in further implementation.
- Aggregate discussion document for focus group to share experiences and identify cross-cutting themes/recommendations.
- White paper for broader dissemination.

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Evaluation Strategy next steps

- Update/Confirm results from original projects.
- Support ongoing networking among original projects to continue the eval. dialogue.
- Revise eval. strategy based on experience and to accommodate new types of projects.
- Evaluate new projects.
- Document/Disseminate findings & recommendations based on updated information.

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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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Impact: Policy/Regulation

- CE/Discovery defined/endorsed as discrete services in policy/regulation (MS, GA)
- CE/Discovery included in VR 3-year plan (FL DVR)
- Fee code changes
 - Formal code changes for CE & Discovery (MS)
 - Draft code for Customized Supported Employment (GA)
 - Fee codes to purchase CE services during pilot (FL, KY)
- Long term supports
 - FL: DD agencies
 - GA: MOUs between GVRA and DD, MH
 - KY: HCBS waiver – require referral to VR

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Impact, cont.

- **Internal Capacity-building**
 - Creation/Modification of positions to support CE
 - Creating mentor/support teams
- **Provider/Partner Capacity-building**
 - Outreach/Funding strategies to train/develop a pool of VR-approved CRPs (GA)
 - Communities of practice (FL, MS, GA)
 - Mentoring strategies (MS, FL-DVR, KY)
 - University-based training or credentialing program in progress (GA, FL-DVR, KY)

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Impact, cont.

- **Strengthened Partnerships**
 - School Districts (early collaboration for youth in transition)
 - Employment First
 - DD and MH agencies
 - Joint outreach & tracking strategies
 - Shared recognition that CE is a cross-system continuum of services requiring collaboration
 - Reduced 'finger pointing'

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Impact, cont.

- **Awareness of CE as an option:** Leaders, staff, partners, advocates, jobseekers/families are increasingly aware of (even requesting) CE or Discovery as a credible option for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

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Impact, cont.

- **Understanding of CE as a change in practice:** Leaders, staff, partners...
 - Understand their common interest in CE on a cross-systems continuum.
 - Appreciate the difference between CE and traditional practice, and are able to design/ implement systems changes accordingly.
 - Are willing/able to open/re-open cases, make referrals, purchase services, agree on process & expected outcomes.

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Impact, cont.

- **Utilization of CE by VR systems practitioners:** As a result of the above,...
 - VR counselors now have alternatives for working with jobseekers with the most significant disabilities.
 - Increased numbers of practitioners have the skills and willingness to invite referrals, apply CE/Discovery techniques with greater fidelity and achieve improved employment outcomes.

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Highlights

- Leadership willingness to take risks, devote resources to a practice untested in their system.
- Systems changes that substantially increased capacity to serve jobseekers with the most significant disabilities.
- Outcomes clearly attributable to the intervention.
- Costs deemed worth the return on investment.
- Pilot results formed the basis for decisions to expand, replicate, sustain the practice.

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Challenges

- Reinforcing that this is about serving a population for whom VR traditionally has not had a successful strategy; that building capacity will take time/effort and will be a departure from business as usual.
- Consistently engaging leadership & management commitment sufficient to support and sustain a project (even through personnel changes).

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Challenges, cont.

- Project planning to create the environment for a successful pilot
 - Time commitments
 - Key milestones
 - VR & partner roles
- Articulating success measures directly connected to project activities, and the terms/triggers for moving from one phase of implementation to another.

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Challenges, cont.

- Communicating expectations to stakeholders and participants.
- Coordinating performance-based training in teams with assigned jobseekers.
- Prioritizing resources for project management and face-to-face training and technical assistance.
- Scheduling training to minimize conflicts and maximize continuity.

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Continuous Improvement Opportunities

- Provide guidance in adapting the practice to fit local needs and circumstances.
- Incorporate a mentoring component for ongoing support.
- Continue to build southeast VR confidence to open cases for jobseekers with most significant disabilities.
- Prioritize project mgt & facilitation resources.
- Develop a community of practice.

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Continuous Improvement Opportunities, cont.

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- Identify supplemental resources to finance project activities and ongoing operations.
- Assemble/Disseminate materials, templates, testimonials, policies, fee structures, tools and other materials.
- Use distance learning platforms rather than conference calls.
- Develop a leadership program providing CE information for administrators.

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Conclusions & Recommendations

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- The findings from this evaluation...
 - Substantiate the approach used by Southeast TACE to introduce emerging employment practices in the VR context.
 - Justify the investment of Southeast TACE resources to continue to implement, evaluate and improve upon the Innovations initiative.
 - Provide guidance in shaping future directions for the Innovations initiative.

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Conclusions & Recommendations, cont.

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- Southeast TACE recommends:
 - Phased approach for a practice that represents a significant departure from business as usual.
 - Success measures clearly connected to project activities and decisions to expand/sustain.
 - Project workplan covering all phases (from pilot to evaluation and replication to full implementation).
 - Project management and facilitation resources.
 - Clear communication of expectations/implications in advance of committing to participation.

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Questions

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