# VR Program Evaluation Coach

## Choose a Service

Innovations in vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs, policies, and services can help to achieve the goals you've set for your VR offices or counselors. But selecting the service that best fits your needs can be challenging. The VR Program Evaluation Coach is targeted to VR agencies that have already selected or implemented a service change. If you are looking for a service to implement, this guide will help you with that process, and you can return to the VR Program Evaluation Coach when you are ready to plan a pilot of that service and start your program evaluation.

### THREE STEPS FOR SELECTING THE RIGHT SERVICE

1. Conduct a needs assessment.
2. Discover what service might fit your needs.
3. Vet potential services.

### 1. CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A needs assessment will help you identify gaps (needs), set priorities, and determine important criteria for solutions—the services you choose. The assessment can take many forms. It can be informal conversations or interviews with various staff, counselors, or administrators, or it can be a more formal survey, focus group, or working group. You will have to decide what type of needs assessment you would like to undertake based on the time and resources you have available. If you feel as though you already know the needs of your agency and have a sense for how service changes can help you meet those needs, you might not have to conduct a needs assessment. But if you choose to conduct a needs assessment, we've included some helpful guidelines:

A. **Determine your knowledge objective(s).** It's important to outline clearly what you want to learn from the assessment you are conducting. Write out some questions that you want to be able to answer at the end of the assessment based on the information you collect. This will help you determine whom to talk to and what questions to ask them. For example, if you want to know what features might be most effective with a youth transition program, you might want to talk to students, school staff, and VR staff about their needs and about what they think is missing in existing services. If you want to know if you should target specific subgroups of high school students with the service, you might want to talk to VR staff about their needs and about which students need the most help. Make sure to write out each of these knowledge objectives and refer back to them throughout the process of designing and conducting your assessment.

B. **Choose whom you want to participate in your assessment.** Before you begin conducting your assessment, you should determine whom you want to hear from. Perhaps your objectives require input from a wide variety of sources, or maybe you want to focus only on VR staff, administrators,

or clients. Determine whom you'll need to speak to and invite them to participate in your assessment.

C.  **Develop your questions.** When you identify your participants, develop the questions that you will ask them to reach your knowledge objectives.

D.  **Conduct your assessment.** Now you can begin your assessment. You'll want to record the responses. For an informal assessment, this could mean taking notes during or after your conversations. For a more formal survey, this might mean recording responses in a systematic way.

E.  **Analyze your data and draw conclusions.** After you've spoken to everyone you identified, look back at your data (notes or survey responses) for trends and themes. Have a number of participants made similar comments? Are there needs that people already agree on? These are the items you'll want to consider as you start looking for the right service change.

## 2. DISCOVER WHAT SERVICE MIGHT FIT YOUR NEEDS

Here are some questions to keep in mind while you consider various services:

- What problem are you trying to solve, or what opportunity do you wish to pursue?
- Who should be involved in the selection process?
- What are the technical requirements?
- How much training is required, and how will it be delivered?
- What's the intended implementation approach?
- What type of data or reporting tools do you need?

## 3. VET POTENTIAL SERVICES

In addition to existing requirements and discoveries from the needs assessment, here is a checklist of questions to consider when vetting services:

☐ Does the implementation model you have in mind match what the service is designed to do?
  - Counselor-level versus office-level services
  - Students or youth versus working-age clients
  - Counselor-provided services versus purchased services

☐ Service fit
  - What problem do you wish to solve, and how does the service address the problem?
  - Does the service address the desired employment or other outcome(s)?
  - Does the theory of change or learning underlying the service match your approach?

☐ Implementation issues
  - How easy is it to implement or use the service?
  - Do VR counselors and staff have to participate in some preparatory training?

- Is the service compatible with your agency's existing policies and programs?
- For services meant to be used outside the office, do intended users have access to the needed resources?

☐ Cost and time needed for implementation

- What costs are associated with implementing the service? Are any additional equipment purchases involved?
- What costs are associated with administrative and staff time for training, learning about the service, and incorporating the service into the existing milieu?

☐ Evidence of effectiveness

- Is there strong evidence of the effectiveness of the service?
- Is the evidence of effectiveness specifically for clients and settings like yours?

☐ System data availability

- What learning and usage indicators does the service require?
- Do you have the information you need to determine whether the service is effective in achieving your goals?