

Plenty with 20: The Top 20 Tips for Acclimating New Administrators to VR

If you are new to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and have just landed a job in a leadership position, here are the top 20 things to know.

Tip 1: Understand your agency's structure -- General, Combined, Blind.

- Find out if your agency's program is General, Blind, or Combined.
- If in a State with two VR agencies, reach out to the other Director.
- Find out your organizational structure and its history. Are you a Designated State Agency, a Designated State Unit, or an Independent Commission?
- Read the Technical Assistance Circulars (TACs).

Resources

- [TAC 12-03 Organizational Structure and Non-Delegable Responsibilities of the Designated State Unit for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program](#)
- [TAC 13-02 Reorganization of the Designated State Agency and the Designated State Unit for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program](#)

Tip 2: Understand the Federal Administration of the VR program.

- Identify the RSA State Liaison and Financial Management Specialist for your agency and save their contact information.
- Read your agency's last monitoring report, making note of any improvements expected, and identify improvements that have been made since your agency's last report.
- Familiarize yourself with any corrective action plans resulting from recent monitoring reviews.

Resources

- [State Liaison](#) and a [Financial Management Specialist](#)

- Get familiar with the [Federal Fiscal Year \(FFY\) Monitoring and Technical Assistance Guides](#) (MTAG) for the current and previous guides to understand the focus areas and scope of monitoring.
- [Monitoring and Technical Assistance Reports](#)

Tip 3: Be "in the know" -- you can't lead effectively if you don't know what you're leading.

- Sign up for RSA email updates.
- Bookmark the RSA website.

Resources

- [RSA email sign-up](#)
- [RSA's website](#)
- [VR Program Reference Guide](#)

Tip 4: Be intellectually curious.

- Identify the subject-matter experts who have a rich history of VR.
- Get to know the various technical assistance centers available to you and their purpose.
- Tap into your assigned RSA liaisons. They desire an active relationship with your state.

Tip 5: Learn about the history of VR.

- Communicate the history of VR throughout your organization.

Resources

- [The Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936](#)
- [The Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1954](#)
- [The Vocational Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1965](#)
- [The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1978](#)
- [The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986](#)
- [The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990](#)
- [The 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act](#)
- [1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act](#)

- [The Workforce Investment Partnership Act of 1998](#)
- [The 2002 Help America Vote Act](#)
- [The Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) Amendments of 2008](#)
- [The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#)
- [The State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program - The First 100 Years](#)

Tip 6: Learn about the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC).

- Read the linked information.
- Find out the list of SRC members for your agency and meet with the chair. Get to know all the members and the contributions they bring to the SRC.

Resources

- [State Rehabilitation Council](#)

Tip 7: Familiarize yourself with the Training and Technical Assistance Centers.

- Bookmark the TA Centers' websites so you can access them quickly and easily.

Resources

- [RSA's website](#)

Tip 8: Understand that your agency is part of a larger network.

- Get a list of the core partners with the key contact information.
- Set up a meeting with each of the core partners to learn more about their programs.
- Participate in the State and Local Workforce Development Boards.

Resources

- [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#)

Tip 9: Read your State Plan and understand the difference between the Unified and Combined State Plan.

- Find out what type of State Plan you have.
- Read your State Plan and familiarize yourself with the goals and strategies.
- Review the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan.

Resources

- [WIOA State Plan Portal](#)

Tip 10: The VR program juggles multiple annual cycles.

- Find out the dates for your State fiscal year.
- Understand the Federal fiscal year (Oct. 1 - Sept. 30).
- Understand the Federal program year (July 1 - June 30).

Tip 11: Know your money.

- Find out the total amount of your Federal Grant Award(s).
- Talk with the State's fiscal staff about the budget, budget reporting, and your current financial position, and set up a time to meet regularly with your team to track your financial position in alignment with the organization's goals and priorities.

Resources

- [VR Program Fiscal Management under Grant Award Issuance](#)

Tip 12: The VR program has a State share/cost matching requirement.

- Speak with fiscal staff about your agency's sources of match.
- Learn the history of how these match sources came into existence and any special considerations around sustainability.

Resources

- [Match calculator](#)
- [VRTAC-QM VR Program Fiscal Management](#)

Tip 13: Do NOT transfer Federal award funds between General and Blind Agencies without talking to RSA first.

Tip 14: Learn what regulations apply to the VR Program.

- Bookmark these regulations/statutes.
- Read the regulations/statutes.

Resources

- [RSA Laws, Regulations and Policies](#)
- [Legislation](#)
- [WIOA Regulations](#)
- [VR Program-Specific Regulations](#)
- [RSA Sub-Regulatory Guidance](#)
- [Fiscal & Other Federal Guidance](#)
- [Rehabilitation Services Administration](#)
- [397](#)
- [2 C.F.R. part 200-Uniform Grant Guidance](#)

Tip 15: Learn the lingo.

- Download the [acronym list](#) and keep it as a desk reference.

Tip 16: Learn disability etiquette.

- Read/watch the resources referenced.

Resources

- [Forbes: It's Time For A Reimagining of Disability Etiquette](#)
- [JAN-Disability Etiquette](#)
- [NDNRC-Disability Etiquette Fact Sheet](#)
- [Etiquette: Interacting with People with Disabilities YouTube Video](#)

Tip 17: There are five "non-delegable" responsibilities for VR.

- Read [TAC 12-03](#).

Tip 18: Get into the data.

- Ask your agency data specialist for the RSA-generated Quarterly Data Dashboards and review them for understanding.
- Ask your agency financial and program data specialists for any internal/ad hoc

reports and queries that are generated to analyze performance and financial positions, and review them for understanding.

- Speak with your agency data specialists about comparisons between expenditures and performance measures (e.g., where the agency has training expenditures, are there associated measurable skill gains and credentials?).
- Consider performance measures/outcomes in comparison to the goals of the State Plan.
- If you are in a state with both a General and Blind agency, meet with the other VR agency's director to discuss joint WIOA performance accountability measures. (Conduct discussions about State requirements for match, maintenance of effort, pre-employment transition services reserve requirements, etc.)
- Meet with WIOA partner directors to discuss WIOA performance measures and data collection/sharing activities.

Resources

- [Performance Reporting Tools & Resources](#)
- [WIOA Annual Report Data, Technical Assistance Circular \(TAC\) 19-01: Guidance for Jointly Reported Data Validation](#)
- [TAC-17-01: Guidance for WIOA Performance Accountability](#)

Tip 19: Follow the reporting requirements.

- Meet with your agency financial and data specialists to discuss/understand reporting requirements and deadlines.
- Download the report and find out who does the reporting for each area.
- Schedule a recurring meeting with your agency financial and data specialists to discuss and address reporting errors and anomalies.

Resources

- [RSA Formula Grant Programs: Federal Reports and Deadlines](#)

Tip 20: Participate in training and find a buddy.

- Sign up for the next CSAVR Leadership Forum.
- [Check out the NRLI website.](#)
- Reach out to the associations and see how you can get connected with a buddy.

- Get your buddy's contact information.
- Ask your buddy about their top three recommendations for a new VR administrator.

Resources

- [CSAVR](#)
- [NCSAB](#)
- [NRLI](#)