

Recruitment and Retention Pilot Project

Guided Assessment Tool

# Introduction

There is now increased attention on the national scene regarding recruitment and retention of staff in a variety of industries, which has intensified as organizations are adapting to societal shifts in light of a global pandemic and its associated impacts. Anecdotally, more leaders of State VR agencies are reporting major challenges for their organizations in this area.

Although some of the factors seem to be universal in nature across agencies, there are also factors that are unique to each state that impact retention of key staff. Regardless, the one consistent factor critical for organizations is having the capacity to effectively provide services to their constituents, and that requires an array of staff with the skills and knowledge to effectively provide and manage those services.

In order to help State VR agencies address the challenges related to the recruitment and retention of staff, the Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM) has created an assessment tool to help agency leadership perform an in-depth analysis of their current operating environments in order to understand the factors in their agency that are contributing to attrition of key staff.

This guided assessment forms the basis of a process of discovery for organization leadership to define factors that contribute to the problem of attrition and will assist agency leadership in developing solutions. The review will encompass factors both internal and external to the VR agency.

## Process

Staff members from the VRTAC-QM will facilitate a 2-hour online session with you and key staff via a structured interview format in order to complete this assessment. An email was sent to you providing instructions to obtain key information and invite key staff to the meeting.

### Information Used in Assessment

* Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) section of the VR portion of your current State Plan.
* If not included in your CSPD, please provide details about the following:
  + Current and historic (3-5 years) attrition rate
  + The number of pending retirements and their positions
  + Average time to fill staff vacancies
* Any trends you have identified from the following:
  + Stay (Retention) Interviews, if performed in your agency
  + Exit Interviews, if performed in your agency
* Current Recruitment Plan
* Details about your current onboarding process
* Other documents that you believe would be helpful for us to learn more about your organization.

### Staff to Invite to Online Session:

* Members of the Executive Leadership Team
* Human Resources Director
* Staff Development/Training Coordinator
* Field Services Administrator
* Other staff that you determine could assist in this process

## Assessment Items

The information gathered from this guided assessment will comprise the foundation for developing an overall agency plan for recruitment and retention of counselors and staff. We recommend that you gather and compile this information before we meet.

### Overall Risk Indicators

* Attrition rates, retirement rates, and projected retirement eligibility of key personnel
* The average length of time to fill vacancies, and trends over time
* Data from employee satisfaction surveys
* Data from exit interviews
* Statistics on grievances, EEO complaints, and findings over time
* Data from staff development initiatives (e.g., training, mentoring opportunities, performance evaluations)
* Data/Statistics on staff promotions
* Acceptance rate among job candidates to whom positions are offered
* Percent of operating budget spent on training
* Compensation package
  + Should include pay and fringe benefits, e.g., health insurance, retirement plans, leave, tuition assistance, and other compensation provided to employees

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| Environmental Scan |  |
| Political environment of the State |  |
| Current legislation or policies that impact hiring |  |
| Organization of DSA/DSU |  |
| Societal factors to consider, e.g., the Great Realignment |  |
| Collective Bargaining Units in the State |  |
| Unionization/Union practices |  |
| Review of Civil Services practices |  |
| Universities with Rehabilitation Counseling programs in your state and neighboring states   * If yes, do you have staff serving on their advisory board? |  |

## Scan of Current Practices

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| Salary and Classifications |  |
| Review of Compensation |  |
| Salaries |  |
| * Ranges |  |
| * Differentials (based on specialization or geography) |  |
| * Bonuses |  |
| * Merit pay |  |
| Fringe benefits |  |
| * Medical insurance |  |
| * Retirement plan |  |
| * Tuition assistance |  |
| * Leave |  |
| * Other |  |
| Minimum qualifications for counseling staff? |  |
| Starting salaries in comparison with the marketplace? |  |
| Probationary or trainee pay increases upon completion? |  |
| Significant pay increases for experienced counselors? |  |
| Salary differentials for staff with special skills or in specific geographic locations |  |
| Any new classifications being considered? |  |
| Do you have control over the classification being used? |  |
| What are the HR challenges/steps to overcome? |  |

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| Current Recruitment Practices |  |
| Are you using internet sites for recruitment? (LinkedIn, Indeed, Listservs) |  |
| Third party contracts? |  |
| Does the agency have a recruiting and hiring strategy that is targeted to fill both short-term and long-term human capital needs? |  |
| Does the agency use positive and engaging language to promote the positive aspects of the position opening? |  |
| Does the agency conduct targeted outreach and recruitment to diverse populations? |  |
| Is the agency considered an employee-friendly workplace? |  |
| Does your agency have a specific plan to increase diversity, equity and inclusion? |  |

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| Current Retention Practices |  |
| Employee engagement surveys and/or assessments. (ex.CPP) |  |
| The use of “Stay Interviews” |  |
| Does the agency utilize incentives?   * At hire? * At other intervals (ex. retention)? What are they? * For individual or team accomplishments? |  |
| Do you have a comprehensive data system to track employment trends in your agency? |  |
| Does the agency make appropriate investments in education, training, and other development opportunities to help its employees build the competencies needed to achieve the agency’s shared vision? If yes, outline the opportunities provided to agency staff.   * Does this include an onboarding process that orients the employee to not only the agency, but also to the job? Is that process adequate for the agency? * Does the agency encourage and motivate employees to contribute to continuous learning and improvement? If yes, what does that look like? * Do employees have the opportunity to pursue further degrees or specialties? |  |
| Is the agency considered an employee-friendly workplace?   * Does the agency provide flexibility in schedules? * Does the agency provide telework and remote work options? * Does the agency emphasize work/life balance? * Does the agency assess employee satisfaction on a regular basis? * Do employees have the tools they need to effectively do their job? |  |
| Does the agency have a performance management system that is designed to improve individual and team performance and to steer the workforce toward embodying and effectively pursuing the agency’s shared vision?   * Do employees get regular performance feedback? * Does the agency promote/practice coaching strategies? |  |

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| Creative Staffing |
| Does the state agency have the opportunity for counselor specialization? |
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| In addition to visual and hearing impairments, are there other disabilities or groups where counselors may specialize? (TBI, mental illness, mobility impairments, developmental disabilities, transition, etc.) |
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| Do counselors specialize by service area? (post-secondary, Pre-ETs, Supported employment, etc.) |
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| Has the agency considered intake counselors? |
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| Has the agency considered out-sourcing intake? |
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| Does the agency regularly review vacancies and analyze what type of positions are needed to carry out the work (i.e., case management staff to support counselors, data analysts, quality assurance, etc.)? |
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| Has the agency considered or utilized a team model approach for managing cases? |
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| Caseload Sizes |
| Has the agency set a caseload size or some way to limit caseload sizes from being overwhelming? |
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| Specialization of caseload? |
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| What influences caseload sizes? |
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| Order of selection? |
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| Itinerant counselors for areas of the state with shortages of VRCs? |
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| Shifting or changes in territory? Referral sources? |
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| Float counselors used to fill in for vacancies/leaves? |
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| Advancement Opportunities |  |
| Counselor trainee positions? |  |
| Multiple steps in responsibility and function such as: Counselor-Senior Counselor-Master Counselor positions? |  |
| Other staff advancement opportunities? |  |
| Is there a formal succession plan? |  |

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| Opportunities for Special Projects |
| Does the agency use work groups for continuous improvement projects? Teams? |
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| Do staff participate in cross agency projects or teams? |
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| Are staff encouraged to bring forward their ideas for efficiency and effectiveness? |
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| Systems Modernization and Use of Technology |
| Do you need a new case management system? |
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| Is there/has there been consideration of the use of an artificial intelligence (AI) system like SARA? (Virtual Assistant) |
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| Does staff have the technology needed to do their jobs? If not, what is missing? |
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| Location |
| Has the agency examined the use of remote workplaces? How and when? |
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| Does the agency provide adequate support for remote work? |
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| Is commute time an issue? Where? |
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| Are there issues with office placement in rural and remote locations? |
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| Are staff office locations safe? If not, what is the agency doing to mitigate concerns? |
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| Process Streamlining |
| Does the agency have a continuous effort to streamline all case processes? |
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| Has the agency examined the VR services/invoice payment system? |
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| Is communication within the agency streamlined? How is technology used? |
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| Is communication real-time? Is it centralized? Easy to access? |
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| Is email clutter a concern? |
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| Does the agency use a shared electronic space (i.e., SharePoint) to organize policies/procedures/documents and other important information? |
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| Staff Recognition |  |
| Recognition that is meaningful to the individual? Beyond certificates and plaques. |  |
| Bonuses? |  |
| Leave time? |  |
| Regular use of thank you notes, employee shout outs in newsletters, etc.? |  |
| Does your agency have a specific plan to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion? |  |

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| Leadership Training for Supervisors/Managers |  |
| Does the agency provide leadership training? |  |
| Does the agency have a process for mentoring supervisors/managers? |  |
| Do supervisors/managers get 360-degree feedback? |  |
| Does the agency foster training and mentoring programs for future leaders? |  |

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| Input |
| Does the agency use “Stay Interviews?” |
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| Are employee surveys conducted? |
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| How are exit interviews conducted and utilized? |
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| Culture |
| How would staff describe the culture of the organization? |
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| Does the culture vary from office to office? |
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| Do staff feel free to innovate, be creative and make mistakes without fear of retribution? |
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| Are staff encouraged to grow and supported when they challenge the process? |
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| How would you describe the “trust” level among all levels of staff? |
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| How much control do staff have over how they perform their work? |
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| Do staff have the opportunity for input into program decisions? How? |
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| Why do staff stay with the agency? |
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| How is information shared and disseminated? |
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| Are leaders at ALL levels accessible to employees? |
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| If money was not a factor, would you work here for free? Why? Why not? |
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| What makes you want to take leave from work? |
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| (For leaders/supervisors ONLY) Would you want to be led by you? Why? Why not? Would others agree with your self-assessment? |
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