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Year Three Mid-Year Evaluation Report

SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY Research foundation

INTERWORK INSTITUTE

VRTAC-QM

YEAR THREE

MID-YEAR evaluation

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Formative Evaluation Highlights:

* The customized, online TA Tracker built for the VRTAC-QM has been further enhanced over the first half of Year Three to more efficiently and effectively capture the nature, content, and outcomes of TA being provided.
* The ITAA App has been completely automated with drop-down menus driving data entry and auto-population of fields based on pre-defined connections between activities and outputs in existing logic models. This App connects to a Workplan App and automatically generates online Workplans based on the ITAA for tracking and managing intensive work with SVRAs.
* CSAVR 2023 conference planning included evaluation from its inception by defining clear outcomes for efforts to improve management and performance in alignment with each presentation topic. These outcomes of the conference are now part of the online TA Tracker to ensure they are tracked for impact assessment.
* All of the above enhancements to tracking mechanisms enhance the efficiency of TA Team work and the consistency and accuracy of evaluation data.
* Website resources on Leadership Management demonstrate that VRTAC-QM is in a position to be a national thought influencer in Leadership and Management, building off the approach implemented by the National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute.

## Communities of Practice Evaluation Highlights:

* Despite a short timeframe during which an Impact Survey has been in the field, a strong number of responses was received (and continue to be received at the time of this report) – with at least half of agencies represented.
* All the CoPs received strong positive feedback and endorsement of tangible, measurable changes to agency processes, policies, and collaborations in ways that are changing how services are implemented and received, how they are funded and sustained, and how they are managed to focus on quality and outcomes.

## Management Concepts Evaluation Highlights:

* The new and tailored courses being offered to VR agency staff across the country by Management Concepts in collaboration with VRTAC-QM are being enthusiastically received. Multiple agency staff are taking the courses and clearly reporting perceived value of the opportunity.
* Knowledge tests and pass/fail requirements show that the courses are designed to support learning and indeed capacity is being built as trainees complete courses, pass, and demonstrate significant improvement in learning between pre- and post-tests.

## Recruitment and Retention Highlights:

* SVRAs participating in this project are experiencing issues consistent with national trends around retention and employee engagement.
* This Special Project will afford the opportunity for VRTAC-QM to build its capacity around changing agency culture as well as targeted recruitment and retention strategies.

SECTION ONE:

INTRODUCTION &

FORMATIVE EVALUATION

# I. INTRODUCTION

## Focus of the Year Three Mid-Year Report

This Mid-Year Report for Year Three of the VRTAC-QM focuses on targeted coverage of key developments in the Center’s activities (formative evaluation) and outcomes (summative evaluation). Specifically, we focus on new efforts launched by the Center and take a closer look at key areas of technical assistance including:

Formative

* Augmentation to the TA Tracking System
* Upgraded Automation of ITAA and Workplan Documentation and Tracking
* CSAVR Spring 2023 Conference
* Website Content and Strategy: Leadership Management

Summative

* Communities of Practice and Impact (Targeted TA)
* Management Concepts Training (Targeted TA)
* Recruitment and Retention Pilot (Intensive TA/Special Project)

## Evaluation Data Sources

Evaluation sources of data that were collected and analyzed to inform the summaries and findings of this report include:

* The VRTAC-QM Quarterly and Mid-Year Reports
* Conference Planning and Follow-Up Meeting Notes
* Group Discussions of VRTAC-QM TA Team
* The Online TA Tracker
* Community of Practice Impact Evaluation Survey
* Management Concepts Attendance, Test, and Satisfaction Data
* Recruitment and Retention Pilot Documents

# II. FORMATIVE EVALUATION

## Online Technical Assistance Tracker

All TA provided by the Center is entered into an online “TA Tracker” regularly by TA Team members. As noted in the Year Two Annual Evaluation Report, the TA Tracker System customized for the VRTAC-QM went live in the 2nd quarter of Year Two, allowing for improved recoding of TA provided by subcategories within the main topic areas, the nature of TA provided (consultation, facilitation, etc.), and the mode of TA. In addition, outcomes relevant to the work of QM could be recorded, as well as their progress. This allows for evaluation of outcome attainment not just for Intensive TA, but where appropriate, Targeted TA and Universal TA as well.

Analyses conducted by the Evaluation Team after the close of Year Two demonstrated a significantly high volume of entries in “other” categories. Thus, over the second quarter of Year Three, a thorough examination of each of the “other” categories’ data was examined, category-by-category, to determine any patterns or insights. Through the use of a thematic coding procedure, it became apparent that there were topics of TA being provided fairly often that did not fit within the existing categorical options available in the TA Tracker. After discussion with VRTAC-QM Leadership, several new sub-options have been added to the main topics available in the TA Tracker to more accurately and comprehensively capture the TA being conducted. In some cases, a reassessment of the use of “other” categories was made and the category was eliminated. In all, 11 new sub-categories were added to the “Program and Performance” category of TA and 10 new sub-categories were added to the “Fiscal and Resources” category of TA:

|  |
| --- |
| Changes to Q5-1 Program & Performance Sub-Categories: |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | A | Program & Performance QM |  |
|  | B | CAP response and work plan |  |
|  | C | CMS data collection |  |
|  | D | Data analytics for program improvement |  |
|  | E | P&P and internal controls - VR program |  |
|  | F | P&P and internal controls - WIOA performance |  |
|  | G | Program improvement |  |
|  | H | Reporting |  |
|  | I | Staff performance standards |  |
|  | J | Staff training - VR program |  |
|  | K | Staff training - WIOA performance |  |
| ADD: | **L** | **Pre-ETS** |  |
| ADD: | **M** | **Exit** | Trigger for collaboration outcome to be asked about. |
| ADD: | **N** | **Monitoring** |  |
| ADD: | **O** | **Eligibility** |  |
| ADD: | **P** | **Rapid Engagement** |  |
| ADD: | **Q** | **Order of Selection** |  |
| ADD: | **R** | **Program Evaluation & Quality Assurance** |  |
| ADD: | **S** | **State Rehabilitation Council** |  |
| ADD: | **T** | **Recruitment & Retention** | Trigger for collaboration outcome to be asked about. |
| ADD: | **U** | **Blind Services/Agency** |  |
| ADD: | **V** | **Coaching** | Trigger for collaboration outcome to be asked about. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Changes to Q5-2 Fiscal & Resource Sub-Categories: |  |

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | A | Fiscal & Resource QM |  |
|  | B | Assignment of obligations |  |
|  | C | CAP response and work plan |  |
|  | D | Fiscal reporting |  |
|  | E | Indirect costs/cost allocation |  |
|  | F | P&P and internal controls |  |
|  | G | Pre-ETS fiscal |  |
|  | H | Sources of n-federal share |  |
|  | I | Training - grant management |  |
|  | J | Training - period of performance |  |
| ADD: | **K** | **A-DRAN** |  |
| ADD: | **L** | **CMS Fiscal** |  |
| ADD: | **M** | **Contracting** |  |
| ADD: | **N** | **Rate-Setting** |  |
| ADD: | **O** | **DSA-DSU** | Trigger for collaboration outcome to be asked about. |
| ADD: | **P** | **Fiscal Forecasting** |  |
| ADD: | **Q** | **Fiscal Forum (Mgmt Concepts)** |  |
| ADD: | **R** | **Match/MOE** |  |
| ADD: | **S** | **Monitoring** |  |
| ADD: | **T** | **Order of Selection** |  |

In addition, changes previously considered to more effectively parse the nature of Universal TA (e.g., creating follow-up questions tailored to the type of Universal TA such as “number of downloads/listens” for podcasts) were also made and went live during the first part of Year Three. Due to all these various changes in the TA Tracker, several recent hires over the past two years, and findings from a general examination of patterns of use of the TA Tracker, there will be a focused team discussion in the second part of Year Three to share changes and fully train all staff in how the TA Tracker categories are operationalized.

Finally, the importance of considering the outcome of TA and recording it within the tracker, with ongoing progress reporting, will be emphasized – the enhanced outcome options in the TA Tracker are new to the customized QM Tracker and a change from how the WINTAC TA Tracker (a legacy TA Tracker used for the first year-and-a-half of the VRTAC-QM) functioned. Yet another change made during the first half of Year Three to the TA Tracker is a mandatory connection between certain selections when describing the TA and the outcome field. For example, when a selection is made for “type of entity served” that is a non-VR entity, this immediately causes the TA Tracker to flag the outcome fields, and specifically ask the person doing online entry to consider if the outcome of “Collaboration with Federal, State, or Local agencies” is implicated. This can be seen in the tables above where “triggers” for this automated process to occur are noted. In keeping with additions to categories where needed, two new outcomes were also added to the drop-down menu for outcomes: (1) Improve management of the program and (2) Improve recruitment and retention of staff. The latter clearly connects with the work of the Recruitment and Retention Pilot, which is further explored later in this report.

These enhancements and changes to the TA Tracker will improve the capture of the nature, content, and outcomes of TA being provided by the TA Team and make data entry more efficient by allowing for fast “click-through” options instead of requiring long narratives to explain common categories of work being done. (Additional changes made to the TA Tracker to accommodate tracking of the impact of the Spring 2023 Conference are detailed further below in this section of the report.)

## Automated ITAA and Workplan Generation and Tracking

As with the online TA Tracker, an online system (ITAA App) for creating “final formatted” ITA agreements (ITAAs) was developed for the VRTAC-QM, based on the template originally created for the WINTAC. TA Team members would consult the collaboratively developed (and continuously evolving) Logic Models for each of the areas of VRTAC-QM to select activities that address the need of a particular state agency. These activities have previously conceptualized and expected outputs defined in a 1:1 correspondence. A separate outcome list for each area allows for several outcomes to be selected as relevant. Once consensus is reached between QM TA Team members and state agency staff, a final document is created in the ITAA App by typing in selected items.

Over the latter part of Year Two and first half of Year Three, QM Evaluation Team members worked with the IT Team and QM Leadership to further automate the ITAA App so that Logic Models are built into the App and rather than typing entries manually, TA Team members can build an ITAA entirely online using point and click selections. For example, once a topic area (e.g., Fiscal or Program) is selected from a drop-down menu, activities to be selected load into new drop-down menus in that topic area. An activity selection once selected will auto-populate the corresponding output. These new automated processes eliminate the need for manually constructing an ITAA in the App. The option to customize each selection remains, with text-boxes available for each selection to note any customizations. In addition, outcomes requiring specification (for example, worded such as “XX% increase in the number of …”) are scripted within the App to require that specification in a text box when the outcome is selected from a drop-down menu. This will ensure that recording that goal and expectation does not get inadvertently missed as sometimes could happen with manual data entry.

Further, and notably, a new “Workplan App” has been developed in companionship with the ITAA App. Previously, TA Team members would have to repeat the manual entries made for the ITAA into a spreadsheet template that serves as the “workplan” consulted by TA Team members and state agency staff monthly and tracks progress for programmatic and evaluation purposes. Now, selections made in the ITAA App automatically generate a workplan spreadsheet, which can be viewed online by TA Team members and state agency staff and efficiently updated. This also eliminates the need to carefully track and transfer spreadsheets as separate documents which can often lead to file version confusion and ensures consistency of data input and format for evaluation purposes. The Workplan App has warning messages that appear when important fields are not populated, including progress metrics.

Once again, it is anticipated that these automations and enhancements will make working through QM processes for establishing and tracking ITAA work easier and more efficient for TA Team members and state agency staff. Information critical to evaluation will be more consistent and more complete. Evaluation Team members are entering all pre-existing ITAAs into this new system during the third quarter of Year Three and a training will be provided by QM Leadership, IT Team staff, and Evaluation Team staff to the TA Team so they can begin to use these new Apps.

## CSAVR Spring 2023 Conference

Due to the frequency and amount of unspent or unmatched funds being returned annually to RSA from State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies (SVRAs), a consensus was developed between RSA, CSAVR, VRTAC-QM, and other TACs to avail of the opportunity presented by CSAVR’s conference schedule and Spring 2023 meeting to focus on an agenda of building capacity around quality management and services which increase allowable expenditures by promoting services to customers which ultimately increase quality employment outcomes. The VRTAC-QM was responsible for much of the content development of presentations, as well as handouts, and management of an online submission process for requesting RSA discussion of questions each day and for requesting post-conference TA.

Once the agenda for the conference was developed, and each session’s topic became clearly identified, evaluation planning took place to determine what outcome of TA connected to each conference topic could be achieved within a short-term time frame of one year. The goal was to communicate the outcome expectations to conference attendees and motivate focused conference follow-up action leading to measurable improvements and impacts. In addition, evaluation discussions during the conference planning period addressed how follow-up TA could occur to keep the momentum of action and engagement going after the conference itself. While existing TA processes and relationships with SVRAs may naturally provide opportunities to weave in new work related to conference topics, focused Communities of Practice (CoPs) were also discussed as a means to engage several SVRAs around the same topic and efficiently provide TA at scale. CoPs are already being used effectively (see further below in this report for preliminary impact evaluations of existing QM CoPs) by QM to support quality management and implementation of practices and create change within agency operations and programs. Some are being expanded to welcome new members or cohorts as a result of the conference and some are new and just getting started.

The Evaluation Team will work with TA Team members leading the CoPs to evaluate them and track the connection between awareness raised and information obtained at CSAVR, engagement with follow-up TA through the CoPs, and goal-setting and improvement achievement. The outcomes defined during evaluation planning pre-conference, which will serve as initial guideposts, are provided in the table below. In order to ensure that post-conference TA provided outside of CoPs are also accounted for, the online TA Tracker has been modified to create a new “main topic” of TA called “CSAVR” and the conference topics are represented as sub-topics to select from a drop-down menu (see above for how this function works for the Program and Performance main topic and the Fiscal and Resource main topic). The table below also connects each sub-topic selection in the TA Tracker to an outcome that will be specifically selected to populate in the “outcome” field of the TA Tracker and require a progress metric to be identified. Finally, outside of CoPs or the TA Tracker, it may be the case that existing or new ITAAs become inclusive of post-conference follow-up TA and TA Team members have been asked to flag that through notes in the ITAA Workplans as they get continuously updated.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Sub-topics** | **Outcomes** |
| 1. Contracting requirements | 1. All contracts will meet fiscal requirements and program goals increasing allowable expenditures to promote increased services to customers and quality employment outcomes. |
| 1. DSU involvement in allocation and expenditure of VR funds | 1. DSU active involvement in the allocation and expenditure of VR funds and all other non-delegable duties resulting in increased allowable expenditures, promoting increased services to customers and quality employment outcomes. |
| 1. Eligibility determinations & IPE development (Rapid Engagement) | 1. An increase in allowable expenditures and an increase in the speed with which individuals are found eligible and have an IPE developed. |
| 1. Fiscal forecasting, including Pre-ETS forecasting, to develop & implement a financial plan | 1. A financial plan based on the fiscal forecast will be in place and monitored throughout for the year with no funds returned this current/next year, increasing allowable expenditures, promoting increased services to customers and quality employment outcomes. |
| 1. Increased match | 1. Sources of match maximized and spent thereby increasing allowable expenditures for customers and promoting quality employment outcomes. |
| 1. New contractual relationships with community partners | 1. An increase in the number and type of new partnerships and services. An increase in the numbers and diversity of customers being served, and an increase in allowable expenditures that promote effective services to customers and quality employment outcomes. |
| 1. Period of performance and a spending strategy | 1. A spending strategy with internal controls is in place, being implemented, thereby increasing allowable expenditures to promote that promote increased services to customers and quality employment outcomes. |
| 1. Rates for specific services and rate-setting approach | 1. A revised rate structure that increases allowable expenditures, promoting increased services to customers and quality employment outcomes. |
| 1. Strategic planning for expanding program expenditures | 1. New strategies for expanding program expenditures are established and being implemented, increasing allowable expenditures, promoting increased services to customers, businesses, and quality employment outcomes. |

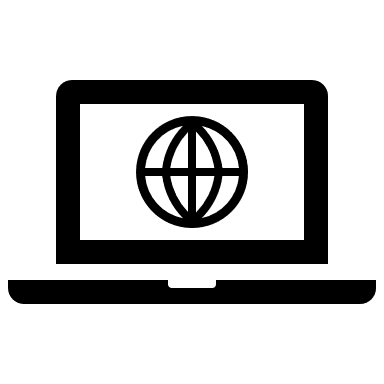
## Website Content and Strategy: Leadership Management

**Overview**

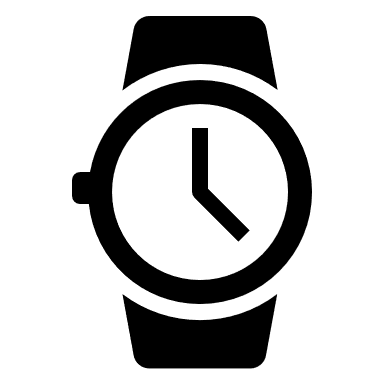
A focus area of VRTAC-QM is General Quality Management of Organizations. Leadership is a sub-category within this focus area. Training and technical assistance are delivered across a variety of platforms and modalities that include face-to-face; virtual through Zoom and web based. Training and TA are delivered in all categories Universal, Targeted and Intensive.

Google Analytics provides information on the traffic through the website. Other means are employed to determine the reach of the training and TA including surveys. A summary of this data is contained within evaluation reports. The VRTAC-QM team has been exploring ways to determine the impact of these resources, training, and TA on SVRA programs.

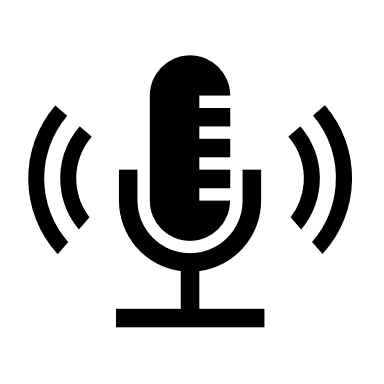
The purpose of this section of the evaluation report is to provide as complete of a compendium as possible of all VRTAC-QM in the work in General Management/Leadership as a basis for making recommendations.

**Website Resources**

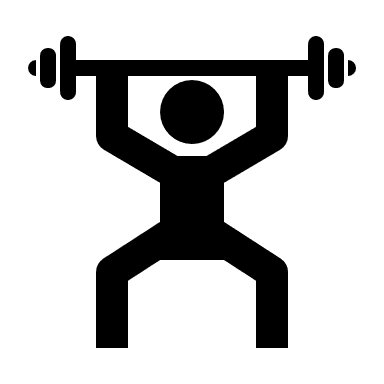
* Coaching Strategies and Performance
* Ethics: Supervision and Technology
* Managing the Shift: The Art of Moving from Peer to Supervisor
* On-Boarding: Lessons Learned
* Top 20 Tips for Acclimating New Managers
* Resolving Conflict
* The Crossword Puzzle for Management

**Minute Managers Podcasts**

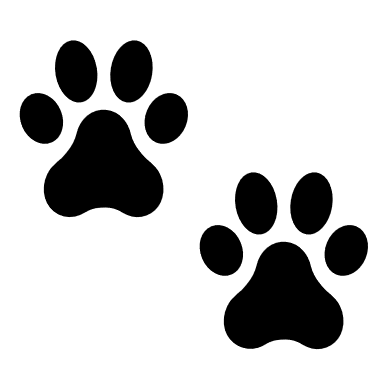
* Managing Financial Resources
* How Persistence Pays Off for Employee Pay Increases
* SARA-The Technology Solution
* Be Bold: Moving forward with the Idea Guy
* Creative Staffing
* National Disability Employment Awareness
* Re-visioning VR Service Delivery
* Listen to VR Legend-Roseann Ashby
* Moving the Employment Needle
* Everything is Bigger in Texas
* Putting Customers First
* Finding the Incentive to Engage in Work
* Employer First Initiatives
* Get in and get ‘er Done-Rapid Engagement
* Let’s Talk Collaboration
* Monitoring: Surviving and Thriving
* Is Fiscal Management Managed
* Is Your Fiscal Management Managed
* New Employment Initiatives and Practices
* Planning for Success with Succession
* Bridging the Gap between the DSA and DSU
* Creative Staffing

**Podcasts (General)**

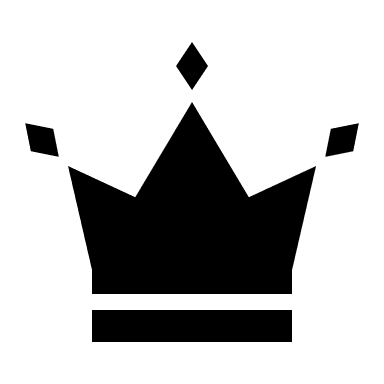
* Leadership Freak
* Ken Blanchard
* A list of 100 Leadership Blogs
* TED Talks
* The Femails by Career Contessa
* Dare to Lead with Brene Brown
* The Leadership Antidote Podcast
* HBR IdeaCast
* A listing of 50 leadership podcasts

**Intensive TA: Washington Blind**

* + Develop a succession plan.
  + Develop leadership staff.

**TA Tracker Activities**

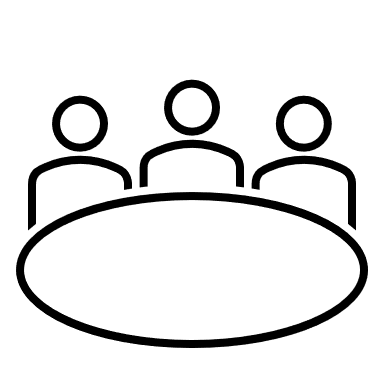
* Leadership Activities
* Mentoring Staff Members-Leadership Development
* Enhance Team Performance
* Leadership on a High Level
* Restructuring/Accountability
* Emerging Leader Training
* Bi-Weekly Coaching

**National Rehabilitation Leadership Institute (NRLI) Session Topics**

*Stated Purpose*: Enrich and expand the leadership vision, knowledge and skills of current and future rehabilitation leaders, through powerful organizational learning experiences that reinforces passion, commitment, learning, creativity, and strategic thinking in the public program of Vocational Rehabilitation.

*Program Design Themes*

* Fiscal and Structural Design
* Leadership and Organizational Issues
* Public Policy and Constituency
* Integration of Strategic Systems

**2021-2023 CSAVR Spring Conference Topics (VRTAC-QM co-facilitates)**

*Theme*: Strategies for responding to the Congressional challenges of “procuring and maximizing all available resources especially fiscal and personnel.”

* Knowing and Managing Resources
* Effective Internal Control
* Working with Your Umbrella Agency in Preparing for the 107 Monitoring
* How to on Business Engagement
* Evolving Organizations and Change
* Redesigning Streamlining
* Hiring and Retention
* NLRI
* Evolve and Redesign
* Pandemic Themes
* Leadership and Change
* Modern Workplace
* Braiding Funding
* Interagency Resource Teams (IRT)
* Bureaucracies and Relationships
* Data
* Managing and sorting through challenges
* Tips for Managing Resources especially Fiscal.
* Making the Job Inspiring to Staff
* Tracking Success in Moving the Workforce Needle

**Reflections and Recommendations**

With the NRLI program and a key role in CSAVR’s Leadership forum, VRTAC-QM is in a position to be a national thought influencer in Leadership and Management. The VRTAC-QM website contains hundreds of resources. Both NRLI and the Leadership Forums are well attended, and surveys conducted thus far indicate a high level of participant satisfaction with the quality of content and presentation.

Based on a review of NRLI course descriptions and agendas from the CSAVR Leadership Forums, it appears that VRTAQ-QM in the Leadership/Management realm lies around mastering an understanding of regulations (mainly fiscal) and using good data to drive decision making. The Evaluation Team will follow-up this content analysis by assessing the impact of NRLI on SVRA leadership capacity through targeted surveys and interviews with participants. VRTAC-QM has identified hundreds of resources around Leadership/Management. The resources represent a general approach to Leadership/Management.

* VRTAC-QM should center its approach to Leadership/Management consistent with NRLI. This is a true area of expertise. All other TA offerings in Leadership/Management should be consistent with this approach.
* Building upon the above recommendation, VRTAC-QM should brand its approach to Leadership/Management across plat forms consistent with NRLI.
* VRTAC-QM should re-consider its general approach to web and social media approaches to Leadership Management. Currently, the website resembles a clearinghouse of resources. A visitor to the web is likely to overwhelmed by the sheer volume alone. In most cases, the web visitor is given little information beyond the title, requiring the visitor investigate further on their own. In, other words, VRTAC-QM should develop a strategy behind the curation of Leadership/Management resources and take a more focused approach. A recommended strategy is to build around the books, articles and other resources offered through NRLI.
* VRTAC-QM currently does not have the capability to determine who (e.g., SVRA, job title) is downloading the resources and what if any impact these resources have. A narrower focus on the number and topics of the resources, along with the identification of the web visitor who is downloading these resources, would allow VRTAC-QM to better target and refine its resource collection without overwhelming the website visitor.

SECTION TWO:

SUMMATIVE EVALUATION

Communities of Practice

# COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE IMPACT EVALUATION

## Overview and Methods

There are several Communities of Practice (CoPs) for the VRTAC-QM and these have been described in quarterly and annual program reports, as well as in prior annual evaluation reports. For this report, five CoPs that have been in place for an extended period of time were selected for an “outcomes” oriented evaluation. The aim was to understand what impact in an agency has occurred due to staff participation in an agency – were policies updated or implemented or collaborations developed to improve services provided to VR customers? The questions exploring changes or impacts were tailored for each CoP based on expectations implicitly or explicitly developed by CoP leadership and members. The five CoPs selected for surveying this quarter included:

* The Monitoring CoP
* The Supported Employment CoP (a collaboration with CIT-VR)
* The Customized Employment CoP (a collaboration with Cornell University)
* The Case File Review CoP
* The Rapid Engagement CoP

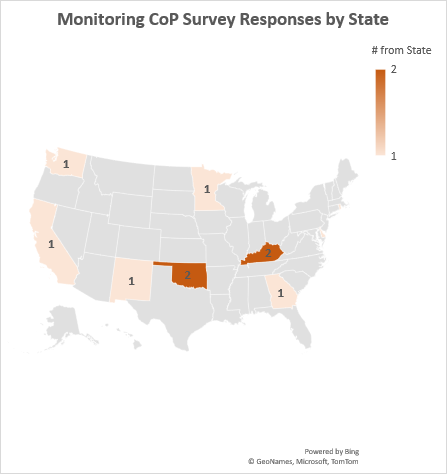
In addition to assessing impacts or changes made by SVRAs, a few additional questions probed barriers to participation, recommendations for strengthening the effectiveness of the CoPs, and the relevance or integration of CoPs with other TA the SVRA may be receiving.

## Response Rate

The vast majority of invitees were from the Monitoring CoP list, which has close to 250 members. These members are not all currently active, but have participated in the CoP since it’s inception. The remaining four CoPs combined had approximately 120 members. There was duplication between the various CoPs in terms of members; in total, 32 duplicate emails were identified by the online survey system. Several emails also bounced back from recipients servers either due to filters and security settings or due to “system hangups.” Ultimately, 67 surveys were started and 54 surveys were viewed in complete, for a 81% completion rate. National coverage was strong, with some agencies being represented across multiple CoPs, but the response rate still demonstrates reach across half or more of the SVRAs across the country:

## Monitoring CoP Findings

As noted above, the largest number of invitees to the CoP Impact Survey were from the Monitoring CoP due to the sheer size of its membership over the years. Not all members are active, but a strong response was seen (many of the initial and immediate responses were from this CoP and were enthusiastic in their feedback, in and of itself a significant data point of the value of this CoP to its members). Respondents geographical and agency type are broken down in the next two charts, although not all survey respondents provided this demographic information:



In terms of the impact of the Monitoring CoP, respondents clearly valued the support of the CoP in preparing them for their Monitoring with RSA – from building action plans to addressing questions. In conjunction with guidance at the CoP, the VRTAC-QM developed Monitoring Tool also supported respondents. Time and again, SVRA staff have shared with the TA Team how challenging preparation for Monitoring can be, and how intimidating, and the palpable sentiment is that support from QM in the form of resources, meetings, and facilitated engagement with peers has been invaluable.

## Case File Review CoP Findings

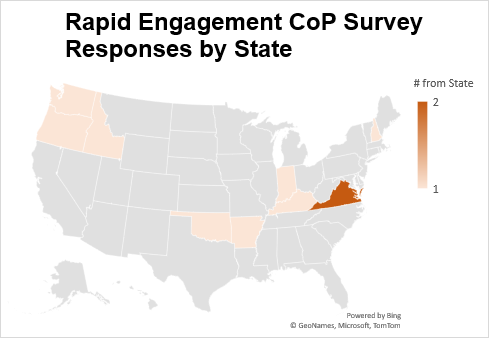
The Case File Review CoP had a small membership, with about 50% of its members responding to our survey thus far:



As previously described in program and evaluation reports, the Case File Review CoP was intentionally designed to have a short run and to be focused on the development of a discrete tool or process. Feedback from respondents demonstrates that designing the CoP this way had its desired effect as all participants reported to CoP facilitators and on the survey instrument that they indeed have revised policies, and adapted or constructed tools for case file reviews. These agency-developed tools are a tangible product of engagement with the CoP and QM reflecting a new process that will now be in place to improve reviews and ensure improved alignment with WIOA. SVRA leadership can now more effectively manage work to meet their objectives.

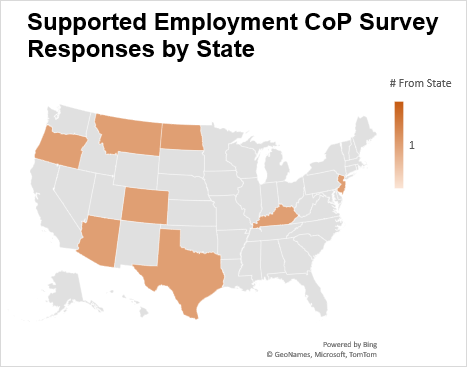
## Rapid Engagement CoP Findings

The Rapid Engagement CoP is built around supporting measurable improvements in the time it takes for clients to reach eligibility and have an IPE developed. As such, it supports SVRAs to examine the current amount of time clients are taking to reach these milestones and supports them in goals and the use of strategies to shorten those times – which QM research demonstrated results in better client employment outcomes. The findings from this survey demonstrate that agencies in the CoP are taking precisely those steps – aligning with QM efforts to improve agency use of data for decision-making and improve their performance. As more time passes, the Evaluation Team will work with the CoP facilitators and members to determine *how* their review of agency data was used to make improvements.



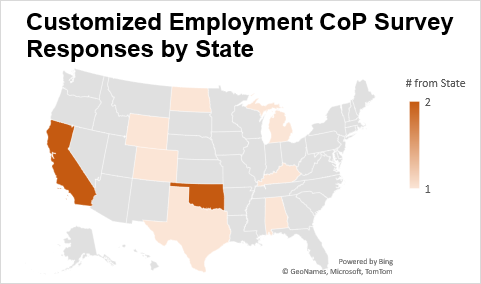
## Supported Employment CoP Findings

The Supported Employment CoP is a longer running CoP of VRTAC-QM and due to the serendipitous timing of their meeting schedule, the Evaluation Team was able to join a meeting during the run of this Impact Survey and present the impact questions as a live poll during the meeting for quick and easy feedback by participants. Combining the findings from the survey and poll yielded the results below, which demonstrate that despite agencies already having Supported Employment programs and expertise in place, they experience a value in joining a CoP and learning about strategies to improve. Agencies report implementing or working on new contracting mechanisms, rate structures, training or certification requirements and other steps to improve the quality management of their Supported Employment programs, including notable collaborations with other agencies.



## Customized Employment CoP Findings

Customized Employment is another one of VRTAC-QM’s long-running CoPs, stretching back to when WINTAC was managed by Interwork Institute. Most of the members have stayed with the CoP and continue to engage robustly in meetings and development of their programs, sustaining them from the WINTAC days of implementing them as a pilot. Respondents to this survey demonstrate significant and meaningful work in CE, including a focus on sustainability, certifications, and fidelity and quality assurance in the delivery of services. These issues are even more salient across the country as many agencies are now embarking upon efforts to support a switch away from subminimum wage employment to competitive integrated employment for a population that is historically been better served by approaches like Customized Employment – indeed, utilizing it as an intervention in their projects. Once again, the increased collaboration with other agencies, who often support and fund individuals best served by CE programs, is particularly notable.



## General CoP Feedback

Respondents were also asked to provide general feedback on the CoPs in an effort to identify the way in which they were supportive of agency work and to determine concrete ways they may be improved. As is to be expected, supporting learning and interaction with peers were key functions as perceived by survey respondents.

In terms of barriers to CoP participation, factors within the control of CoP leaders did not pose meaningful challenges. Rather, it was the age-old challenge of not having enough time that respondents felt prevented them from engaging as often as they would like.

Finally, in an effort to identify concrete steps for improvement, explicit recommendations were requested from respondents, the majority of whom requested…more meetings! After the isolation of the pandemic, survey respondents seem eager to attend conferences, workshops, or meetings so despite the time constraint noted as a barrier they are looking for more opportunities to engage, not fewer.

Management Concepts

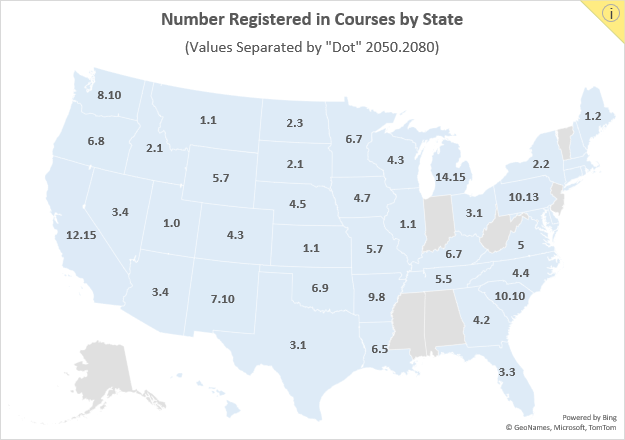
# MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS TRAININGS

## Background

In order to provide foundational knowledge and improve quality management of the VR program, VRTAC-QM has established a contractual engagement with Management Concepts to create customized versions of existing courses regarding grants management (tailored for VR) and a certificate that can be earned when additional elective courses are taken. Management Concepts shares course attendance to confirm participation, as well as individual course pre- and post-test scores, and results of satisfaction surveys. These three sources of data were obtained and support the reporting below. In the future, further data about course elections and pass rates for elective courses beyond the two foundational courses (2050: Uniform Administrative Requirements for Federal Grants: 2 CFR 200 (Subparts A-D) and 2080: Cost Principles for Federal Grants: 2 CFR 200 (Subpart E)) will be requested to allow for tabulation of how many individuals are obtaining the new certificate. Beyond these immediate metrics, the impact within an agency will be explored with future targeted interviews and focus groups in future years when the first cohorts of students have had an opportunity to utilize their knowledge and make changes in their agencies individually or systematically.

## Training Volume

Since the release of information about the availability of courses and a certificate in management of Federal Grants, customized for SVRAs, great enthusiasm has been demonstrated for them. Indeed, several webpage evaluation forms referencing the course were submitted to communicate support. Below, we see a map depicting the registrations in the primary courses (2050 and 2080) by State, demonstrating an expected pattern of more registrants from larger states in each course and multiple staff from each agency attending the courses. The following two tables provide the numbers and percentages of those who ultimately did or did not complete courses and who passed the courses – in both cases, the vast majority (passing requires a 70% or higher percentage correct on questions on the post-test). The tables present data on a third course, 2068: Internal Controls for the Federal Grants Community, but thus far there have been fewer sessions of the course and no attendance or test data was provided in the data files. The breakdown between pass/fail rates are largely the same between 2050 and 2080, although 2080 has a slightly higher no-show rate than 2050 (19% to 16% respectively).



|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Course # | Fail | Incomplete | No Show | Pass | Grand Total |
| 2050 | 4 | 10 | 31 | 148 | 193 |
| 2068 |  |  |  |  | 20 |
| 2080 | 7 | 5 | 40 | 157 | 209 |
| Grand Total | **11** | **15** | **71** | **305** | **422** |

## Satisfaction with Training

Management Concepts conducts post-training surveys to identify trainee perceptions of the effectiveness of the course and format and the utility of the information.[[1]](#footnote-1) In general, all ratings demonstrate high levels of satisfaction with the courses with average ratings considerably above the midpoint of the scale (3 on a 5-pt Likert-type scale).

In the chart below, we see that ratings for the effectiveness of the course and its content are generally high, but highest for course 2080 (Cost Principles). The lowest ratings are related to the online format of the courses and virtual/remote environment and the highest for the instructors and course design and materials. So, overall, the content and content expertise was more valued than the platform and mode of interaction.

Germane to examining perceived capacity-building, trainee ratings of the usefulness of the course demonstrate high ratings, with ratings once again above the mid-point on the rating scale across statements. Trainees believe the course will improve their performance, aligns with their organizational goals (demonstrating relevance and successful adaptation of the courses for a VR audience), was a worthwhile investment in their career development, increased their knowledge and skills, and plan to use their new knowledge in their job. Once again, ratings were slightly higher for course 2080 (Cost Principles) as compared to 2050 (Uniform Administrative Requirements) with course 2068 (Internal Controls) in the middle:

These courses are very information dense, with important nuances that need to be understood carefully. Providing the foundational knowledge comprehensively, but not overwhelmingly is a fine balance and requires that sufficient time is provided. Conversely, given the somewhat dry nature of the material, learner attention can drop off significantly over extended periods of time. Based on trainee ratings, course 2068 (Internal Controls) is the perfect length; the majority of course 2080 trainees (Cost Principles) felt that it was the right length as well, although 11% felt it was too short. Course 2050 participants (Uniform Administrative Requirements) received mixed feedback: half of participants felt the length was right, 15% felt it was too long, and a third felt it was too short:

Trainees could also provide open-ended feedback:

*“It was helpful to hear how UG [Uniform Guidance] applies to what we do and how to search; however, it feels overwhelming.”*

Management Concepts Trainee

*“Small group exercises were helpful”*

Management Concepts Trainee

*“This topic area if very important for my job. Addressing vocational rehabilitation as part of the lecture was very beneficial.”*

Management Concepts Trainee

## Capacity Built

Central to the effort in developing and tailoring these courses was to build the capacity of SVRA staff to obtain foundational knowledge and skills that will support their fiscal and operational management of the VR program and improve their performance (and ultimately client outcomes). Data reviewed above demonstrates that the courses are being well-received and trainees perceive an improvement in their knowledge and a value to how they can use the knowledge in their jobs. An objective assessment of improvement is conducted by Management Concepts, which considers anything less than 70% on the post-test a failure. Courses have pre- and post-tests so knowledge improvements can be determined. Above, when looking at volume of trainees, we saw that three-quarters of trainees in 2050 and 2080 passed the courses (failure rates were fairly low – the decreased rate of passing was due to counting the rate of “no-shows” and “incompletes”). Below, we see that scores on the post-test are a clear improvement from scores on the pre-test, demonstrating knowledge gained and capacity built.

Recruitment and Retention Pilot

# RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PILOT

## Background

In response to the current crisis in staff attrition and recruitment of new staff in many State VR agencies, the VR Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM) launched a pilot project to assist up to four agencies in developing customized strategies to address these issues in their organizations. The four agencies that requested to be part of this pilot project are AR-B, CT-G, IA-G, and OK-C. The purpose of this section is to document is to provide a side by side look at the recruitment and retention issues and project interventions for the four pilot SVRAs.

*National Context for this work*

On the national level, the pandemic ushered in an era of “Great Resignation,” mirroring a turnover trend that had already been happening at SVRAs. A Gallup poll in (2021) identified four key reasons: (1) employees do not see opportunities for development, (2) employees do not feel connected to their company’s purpose, (3) employees feel a lack of recognition, and (4) employees do not feel like they can approach manager with any type of question. Bottom line: employees are not engaged.

Defined by Gallup as “involvement and enthusiasm of employees with their work and workplace,” employees who are engaged are 21 % more productive, have a 10% higher customer service rating, and have a 37% lower absenteeism (Service Now, 2021). So how do employers engage their employees? Service Now’s 2022 survey of three thousand employees of large enterprises found that 63% of employees prefer remote work and 62% agree that COVID will impact work for years to come. Based on pre-pilot discussions with SVRAs, remote work and tension on return to office is as significant a concern in their agencies as it is on the national scale. What can be done?

An increasing trend is to conduct “Stay Surveys:” interviews of current employees shortly after hire and then again months later to determine to what extent employees are motivated, involved, and happy (Finnegan Institute, 2018). Employees are asked five questions:

1. When you are on your way to work what are you looking forward to?
2. What do you learn at work?
3. Why do you stay here?
4. When was the last time you thought about leaving and what prompted you to think that?
5. What can I do as your manager to make things better for you?

*Project Approach*

VRTAC-QM, CSAVR, and CIT-VR staff work in teams to interview key personnel in each of the project SVRAs. The interviews are intended to provide insight into the recruitment and retention issues for each SVRA leading to strategies to address the issues.

## Issues Identified and Intervention in Implementation

**Arkansas Blind**

*Issues*

* Value of Exit Interviews
* New Hire Orientation
* The Great Resignation
* Remote Working
* Salary (Not commensurate with other states and not competitive within the state)
* Most counselors are newly hired
* Telework not allowed
* High turnover rate-14%
* Not consumer focused
* Not allowing remote work is a recruitment issue.
* No succession plan
* Paperwork is a burden
* Multiple leadership/supervisor development resources
* Staff recognition needs improvement
* Differing office cultures around the state

*Project Intervention*

* Measure employee engagement through survey
* Staff Interviews
* 360 Degree Assessments
* Technology to relieve staff administrative burden (SARA)

**Iowa General**

*Issues*

* Limited ability to add full-time staff
* Limited university programs from which to recruit qualified staff. Low enrollment in these programs
* There are monetary incentives for new hires that are not available to existing staff
* On-boarding process needs improvement
* Staff morale impacted by vacancies

*Project Interventions*

* Staff Survey
* Share job postings on Rehab Net
* Create achievement awards
* Focus on training and development
* Address staff issues such as flextime
* Address staffing needs through contracts

**Connecticut General**

*Issues*

* Shortage of qualified VRCs
* Issues with marketing job openings
* Staff want more ability to telework
* Loss of staff due to retirement
* Multiple unions to deal with
* Pay is 130-150% over state median
* Lengthy hiring time (9 months)
* Lengthy time from job posting to candidate interviews
* COVID has impacted staff relations
* Agency returning money due to counselor vacancies
* Six weeks of training for new counselors, diverts from direct service

*Project Interventions*

* Stay Interviews (Finnegan Institute)
* Staff engagement surveys
* Guided approach to recruitment and retention
* Assessment-open ended questions

**Oklahoma Combined**

*Issues*

* Low staff morale
* Difficulty in recruiting
* Difficulty in retaining
* University programs closing
* Turnover is 11 percent
* Salary is 20% below state private entities
* VRCs are paper pushers
* Staff not adjusting well to being back in the office
* Challenge in implementing CSPD
* Lack of a staff recognition program

*Project Interventions*

* Develop a plan to raise salaries
* Conduct and Engagement survey
* Dedicate a full FTE to staff recruitment
* Allow 2 days per week for telecommuting

## Reflections and Recommendations

SVRAs participating in this project are experiencing issues consistent with national trends listed above. Cleary, the COVID pandemic has significantly impacted SVRAs. They include pay, teleworking, job flexibility, recruiting and retaining qualified staff, and SVRA cultural issues (including morale). The results of these issues have been high staff turnover leading to significant disruptions of services and possibly the administration of the agency. Despite their commonality, the issues of pay, teleworking, and job flexibility have varying and unique nuances from agency to agency and will require targeted approach. There may not appear to be a national on size fits all strategies. This is true also for SVRA cultural issues. This Special Project will afford the opportunity for VRTAC-QM to build its capacity around changing agency culture as well as targeted recruitment and retention strategies.

The work thus far has focused upon assisting the SVRAs in clearly defining these issues and developing strategies to address them. The ultimate outcome of this work will be how successful SVRAs are at recruiting and retaining qualified personnel. Lessons learned from this Special Project will assist other SVRAs in developing strategies.

A formative recommendation is for VRTAC-QM to focus and build its capacity around agency cultural change and recruitment and retention, areas where a TAC could play a pivotal role. The culture of a SVRA has a direct impact on its ability to recruit and retain qualified staff. The issues of pay, teleworking, and job flexibility may be best left to the SVRA and state systems. The TAC could play a role in sharing successful strategies among the SVRAs.

1. Rather than burdening SVRA trainees with an additional survey, we utilize the standard evaluations conducted by Management Concepts in its surveys here. QM Evaluators will reach out to trainees in the future to understand how the knowledge they gained made impacts in their agency. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)