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### Service Works!: Collaboration between Vocational Rehabilitation and National Service Programs as an Avenue towards Employment for VR Clients

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# SERVICE WORKS!

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AND NATIONAL SERVICE PROGRAMS AS AN AVENUE TOWARDS EMPLOYMENT FOR VR CLIENTS

### VR CLIENTS: WHY VOLUNTEER?

- ▶ Volunteering and engaging in community service are effective avenues for personal and professional development.
- ▶ Service participants actively contribute to and strengthen their communities.
- ▶ For people with limited vocational experience, national service can be part of a long-range employment plan.
- ▶ Service can allow VR clients to:
  - develop vocational skills
  - gain work experience
  - engage in career exploration
  - build professional networks.

### WHAT DOES A SERVICE EXPERIENCE LOOK LIKE?

- ▶ Tutoring and mentoring
- ▶ Helping communities respond to disasters
- ▶ Community health – outreach programs
- ▶ Building affordable housing
- ▶ Cleaning parks and streams
- ▶ Recruiting, training and managing volunteers
- ▶ Running after-school programs

### NATIONAL SERVICE TO EMPLOYMENT (NEXTSTEP)

The National Service to Employment Project (NextSTEP), funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) conducts research, provides technical assistance, and creates demonstration projects focusing on people with disabilities in volunteer and community-service roles.

### CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICE (CNCS) PROGRAMS

- ▶ Learn and Serve America
- ▶ AmeriCorps
  - State/National
  - VISTA
  - National Civilian Community Corp
- ▶ Senior Corps
  - Foster grandparents
  - RSVP
  - Senior Companion Program



*“I honestly think that without that year [AmeriCorps National], I would not be the person I am today. I would not be as prepared for college as I am today.”*

*“Everyone says you need experience or no one will hire you. One can get experience from volunteer service.”*

### SURVEY OF STATE VR ADMINISTRATORS

- ▶ 26 state VR agencies responded to an online survey on collaboration with their state's service commissions.
- ▶ While some states have developed partnerships, almost half of respondents reported no familiarity with CNCS programs.
- ▶ Approximately 1/5 of reporting VR agencies has some type of relationship with their state's Service Commission.
- ▶ Though some agencies were not aware of the benefits of national service, many perceive it as a way to prepare clients for employment.
- ▶ 2/3 of respondents indicated that they want information about how service can lead to employment for VR clients.

### ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITY: SERVICE COMMISSION STAFF AND VR

#### EMERGING THEMES FROM THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

##### Service provides structured work experience and skill development

- Skill-building in communication, team-building, and problem-solving;
- Members develop goals, define interests and objectives, and establish work routines

##### Partnerships between Service Commission and VR

- Greater opportunities for people with disabilities to move towards competitive employment.
- Extension of VR's resources to serve more individuals with the same dollars.

#### CHALLENGES TO COLLABORATION

- Lack of knowledge about the benefits of national service, how to integrate service experiences into employment plan and how to connect clients with service programs.
- Under RSA regulations service is not a closure since it is a time limited commitment but should be part of an employment plan as structured work experience.

#### SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLES OF COLLABORATION

##### Focus on transition age youth

- Days of Service and by job shadowing service members.
- Connecting VR transition counselors to local service programs
- Use service sites for community based work assessments.

##### State level strategies for collaboration

- Engaging in joint trainings between service commissions and VR
- VR staff participating in service commission inclusion team to promote participation of individuals with disabilities.
- State identifying participation in service as a state level performance goal

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

- Pilot project for VR clients participation in service
- Increased outreach to VR counselors
- Establishing links among federal agencies
- Greater involvement of VR staff with service commissions
- Enhanced data collection and tracking for VR clients who participate in service

### RESOURCES

- ▶ The **Corporation for National and Community Service** (CNCS) engages more than 5 million Americans in service. [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov)
- ▶ The **National Service Inclusion Project** (NSIP) provides training and technical assistance to help national service programs include individuals with disabilities as active participants. Contact information for each state's disability coordinator is available at: [www.serviceandinclusion.org](http://www.serviceandinclusion.org)
- ▶ **National Service to Employment Project** (NextSTEP) conducts research, provides technical assistance and creates demonstration projects focusing on people with disabilities in volunteer and community-service roles. Among its other activities, NextSTEP is working to promote collaborations between VR and service programs.
- ▶ **Work Incentive Planning and Assistance projects** (WIPA) serve all Social Security Administration beneficiaries with disabilities. The offices provide benefits planning and assistance services on request. <https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/oesp/providers.nsf/bystate>

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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*“The one thing about my VISTA experience is, although I had some part-time jobs, I never really had an office job. Through VISTA, I was able to learn how to do things like marketing and planning that they don't necessarily teach you in school...VISTA was a way to get hands-on experience without feeling the pressure of 'you're going to fail.'”*



**NextSTEP** ★  
National Service To Employment Project

Corporation for  
NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE ★★ ★



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