**National Employment Team Members: Supporting**

**Vocational Rehabilitation’s Outreach to Businesses**

*Presenters:*

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>> KATHLEEN MURPHY: Hi, I'm Kathleen Murphy, and we appreciate all of you staying here and I'm not going to say ‘til the bitter end, I think that this has been a great conference. So, whatever the opposite is of bitter: salty, sweet, sour? We did want to acknowledge, as Peter was saying, this is the last session of KTER’s embedded track for our State of the Science. KTER stands for the Center on Knowledge Translation for Employment Research, as a Disability and Rehabilitation Research Project (DRRP) funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, most DRRPs do this culminating State of the Science in year four. At the end of year four, where we think through where have we been, what do we have to say after four years, what is the State of the Science in knowledge translation for disability employment research, what do other grantees have to say? I see some familiar faces from the previous session we just had with Wendy Strobel-Gower from Cornell, talking about her Diversity Partners project. There are some common themes that you will see moving forward in this presentation from what she was discussing.

This presentation is about a third research track that the KTER Center is doing on looking at what is going on with the VR system’s outreach to business and with a specific focus on the members of the National Employment Team. As I mentioned, I'm Kathleen and I'm here with Amber Brown, who was a summer intern this past summer with us. She helped quite a bit on a scoping review we’ll be talking about, and she is also a PhD student at Virginia Commonwealth University and really has led what has lent additional value from Amber's participation in our project, is her experience as a VR counselor in Mississippi.

Another big thank you we have to make is to the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, a KTER Center partner. And in particular for this research track, we worked with Kathy West-Evans of CSAVR and she coordinates the National Employment Team, which is, all of the VR agencies have one member who is their business point of contact.

We are aware that VR agencies are heterogenous in the way they do business outreach, that there is more going on with respect to business outreach than what is happening with members of the NET, but the one value of the approach we are taking is we do have, from a research perspective, a bounded population, there are these 80 NET members. That was a pro and because we were developing this proposal with CSAVR there was particular interest in working with their own initiative.

That development we did for the KTER Center is really key to any KT, collaboration is key. We have what we call Technical Working Groups (TWGs), these are basically advisory boards would be another name for them, for all of the research projects that we do. Yesterday I spoke about our work on pre-employment transition services and research on the employment of adults with autism, where we synthesized research on those topics and trained VR supervisors to be knowledge brokers. For each of those research tracks we have a different TWG, we call it, and they provide us guidance on the research activities, helped us to create focus group participants, looked at every instrument and protocol that we’ve had, participated in webcasts, they help us do outreach for the project itself.

There is a mix of the demographics of the TWGs themselves. We like to include a variety of perspectives, so we have disability-oriented leaders, grantees, consumers, VR, and the employment community. So, for this business TWG, we have involved in particular intensity, Kathe Matrone from the Northwest ADA Center and she is currently especially involved in WINTAC; John O'Neill, director of employment research at the Kessler Foundation, who has been a NIDILRR grantee for many years; and Kathy West-Evans and John Connelly from CSAVR. We are going to talk about what we have done and plan to do in the future with the NET. Before I talk about that, some of these slides I did talk about yesterday morning but I figured there might be some new people who didn't go to our knowledge broker presentation so I did want to step back and explain about the KTER Center itself.

As you will see, the goals of the Knowledge Translation for Employment Research, that first bullet there, yes, we are working in the field of disability employment research, but we are a research project about KT. So, our job is to figure out, okay, great, NIDILRR has funded all this research about disability employment. What are effective ways that we can use to promote the uptake of that research? The KTER Center is not what you might think of when you think of KT, that we do training. We do some of that, but it's focused on the grantees in NIDILRR's employment portfolio. We are primarily a research project. The other half of that is, particularly at AIR, when they see employment research in the title of our center, they think we do employment research, clearly, right? We don't, we're looking at promoting the uptake of disability employment research.

We do want to do that, to increase the adoption and use of relevant research in the studies that we do of it, but we want to test strategies that are replicable by NIDILRR grantees. Thinking of a Disability and Rehabilitation Research Project, a Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, what would be feasible for NIDILRR grantees that have that kind of budget to replicate, what kinds of things can we try out for them, and then they can pick it up and do it?

So, in the request for proposals that we responded to in 2015, these are things that were in the RFP that we had to do. This is part of any good knowledge translation is to think through, okay, you're going to work with a certain group of stakeholders -- what are their needs? What do they need to know? Among those needs, what can be addressed with research? Then once you figure out, okay, here are basically the research needs, the information needs they have, we are a NIDILRR-funded center, our position is to promote the uptakes of NIDILRR-funded research and what research has been done that can address those needs? Once you figure out needs, the research that can meet that need, what is the best way of promoting the effective uptake of that?

Back when we were working with John Connelly and Kathy West-Evans, thinking through, I went over yesterday if you have questions, like, it didn't have to be in the field of VR, but we decided we would. What, then, would be informational needs that we can know already, even before we start this work? So, they shared -- it's just on their website or it was at the time -- this needs assessment that they had done in 2012 of their members who are directors of state vocational rehabilitation. What are the top three issues your agency faces in the next four years? This is 2012 data that we were looking at in the spring of 2015, and there were, among other things, some general concern about human resources, client services, return on investment, actually primarily focused on the agencies themselves, but it did indicate a general need or interest in business and organizational oriented topics.

Other formative research we did was from our previous award cycle, we had surveyed counselors in six states and we asked them to tell us how they thought evidence-based practice would be helpful to them, kind of trying to marry the information need, and in an area that research can address. We got 457 comments and we were able to make an informed decision about focusing on pre-employment transition services and the employment of adults with autism. Another thing that came out of that survey was that a supervisor who emphasizes evidenced-based practice, influenced whether researchers were seeking out that information on the job. It makes sense, if it’s something your boss wants you to do. It's kind of a no-brainer.

I don't know if Tim Tansey is here today, he and his colleagues did a similar survey out of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center finding a similar finding that the supervisor matters if you want to promote research uptake. Looking at both of these sources of data, among others, we decided in our approach overall to the work that we were going to do, we were going to look at the central role of management and then have these research tracks, which would include business outreach. So, again, if you have questions about those other two research tracks, I presented on that yesterday so I'm glossing over the details of that since I don't think that is why you all are here this afternoon.

So, let's focus on that research track on business outreach. The first thing we did was part of that first mandate, figuring out what are those pressing informational needs that the NET members have. I was just talking to a member of our audience who is from ICI, Kelly Haines, and we were aware that ICI had done a similar survey but it was a couple of years old, but we did work with that and looked at those topics. In the previous award cycle, we had done 13 focus groups with members of what was then called the U.S. Business Leadership Network about what were their informational needs that research could address. USBLN is how called Disability:IN, for those of you new to the field. Taking both of those surveys together and thinking it through, looking at where are our starters, what can we put on a survey that are topics that might be of interest, and we put that together in a survey and we ran that with the members of the National Employment Team.

So, 39 of them responded, they represented 37 states. There were respondents from 30 general and nine blind. I thought it would be interesting to look at the demographics because it's going to relate to thinking, remember, the whole point of this survey is to figure out what are your informational needs, what research meets them, and then we're going to test a KT strategy. Okay, this helps to know from your KT strategy what's going on with your sample. What are demographics that might be related to what kind of strategy is appropriate for them? Looking at these data, unlike when we surveyed the VR supervisors in our other two tracks, where Amber presented yesterday, 85% of them have master's or CRCs, this type of VR staff looks a little different than the VR supervisors. There is greater heterogeneity in educational background and even though in this sample only about 50 percent of the members are represented, only about a quarter of them hold a CRC. Also related to yesterday's roundtable discussion about staff turnover, there is a wide divergence in tenure, 26% of the NET members who responded had worked for over 10 years in their position, but the median time was only 3.5 years. So, you've got some people who know a lot about their jobs and people who are real new. So, what does that imply for the KT strategy we use for the members of the NET?

The survey questions that we asked, as far as training needs, the basic stem was this -- it was a four-point Likert scale that you will see in the next slide. The degree to which you as a business consultant, you need additional information and training on the competencies, e.g., the knowledge and skills listed below, to better perform your job. This is the NET member's perception of their own training needs. For those of you who were here for Wendy Strobel-Gower's presentation, where she was reporting on a survey of employment specialists, they didn't think they needed any help at all, but if you look at the responses to our NET member survey, a lot of them actually agreed, you can see agreed or strongly agree over what: 100 minus 12.8, right? Agree -- yes, that they want help with outreach communications strategies to business or relationship-building strategies with business.

So, again, it's nice coherence that this is something that matters. We weren't asking about coalition building, so that was an interesting perspective that Wendy's research brought to bear on whether or not we asked all the right questions. These were top training needs, gathering and using labor market data, business needs assessment methods and business success metrics -- how do you know you're doing a good job with the business, like the impact of VR on hiring.

Here’s where we get back to, okay, remember we've got to promote the use of NIDILRR-funded research. I don't know if there are really studies on some of these gathering and using labor market data. Is that an appropriate training need to address with the research that NIDILRR has funded? That's part of the mission of the KTER Center and the challenge we have in working and develop this track of our project. After we did the survey we did focus groups with the survey respondents. We asked for help looking over the results and interpreting them? Six of them said sure and here are some sample quotes. We need a way to explain to our staff why businesses operate the way they do, it would be great to have tips on how to quickly research a company we're interested in approaching so we can walk in with a sense of their needs. It's been difficult this whole issue we were talking about earlier today in this conference -- the first session with the RSA commissioners -- looking at the business metrics and the agency itself hasn't yet decided how it's going to measure its outreach to business.

We also worked with Kathy to recruit some representatives from businesses that the NET works with to talk about these survey results with them. They hit home that they would like NET members to be familiar with the business, understanding business mission and core values, helping a company understand how VR can help, right? They may think VR can help with X, Y and Z, but there might be other things. For example, going back to Wendy's presentation, she had a similar structure in that they had interviewed people with business, interviewed disability service providers and looking at what they thought businesses need, and she said the disability service providers are wanting to talk about customized employment and the businesses don't want that. I don't know if businesses are going to ask for something if they don't even know what it is, so this quote speaks to that.

There may be things that VR can do for businesses, but the NET members will need to know how to explain that in terms that businesses will find interesting and useful. So, again, just the third quote. It's all about, it's almost KT itself, the NET members have to think through what is your audience and what are they going to need, and how can you meet their needs. The point of that activity, that research activity from the perspective of KTER's scope of work, is then to pick a topic for a scoping review. So, we figured out roughly some domains that would be of interest, and what NIDILRR-funded research findings can be used to address these pressing needs. Again, I went over some of this yesterday so I'm going to skate through a little bit and I'm happy to answer questions, so a scoping review -- kind of, maybe I've heard of that, maybe not. So what is a scoping review?

A scoping review, the idea is that you are looking at the landscape of a literature. You want to go pretty quickly, not take years and years, figure out what does it look like? How much research is there on this whole domain of VR’s outreach to business, what are the key concepts? What kind of research is there, what are the main sources, what types of evidence are out there? So, you might look at the extent, the range, the nature of the research activity, does it make sense to look at one particular intervention that's been researched and really do a full-blown systematic review on whether or not that intervention works? Do you want to summarize basically the peaks and valleys of your landscape? What hasn't been researched? Let me tell you in this field, a whole lot!

So, we used those NET member survey results, we used the findings from the focus groups, and then we hashed through several teleconferences with our TWG members to think through, how are we going to really make this operational as a scoping review? With a scoping review you do have a librarian, she has to come up with search terms, you've got to pick the databases, this has to be something that is researchable. So we decided we would figure out what research is out there that has looked at VR’s efforts to understand and assess business needs, VR’s efforts to market to business, and to support business.

We did a database search starting in 1988. The reason we picked 1988 as a date is because there was an IRI report in that year that was one of the first seminal pieces really promoting the idea of a dual customer approach that VR would take, that not only are their clients customers, but also that businesses are customers as well.

We got 459 results, three additional results came from stakeholders, and we had two reviewers looking at the titles and abstracts. When the librarian runs it, you get the title of the article and the abstract, and we had two people deciding, should we include this or not, does this article fit?

The first criterion had three parts. One was looking to see that it was either research or consensus-based, so that meant you're knocking out a magazine article. This is super basic, but was it about helping people with disabilities obtain employment? And because the whole point of this is to build this training for the NET members, is there something about this that we can use in the training? So if it met all of those, then we said, okay, now let's categorize this and it may be that a particular study fit more than one of these but is it about marketing to business, about understanding and assessing business needs and/or supporting businesses who have already hired people with disabilities? Now I'm going to turn to Amber, who helped with the coding, and she will talk more about the scoping review results. (Switching seats.)

>> AMBER BROWN: Hi, everyone. I'm going to walk you guys through the process of our study and how we coded our articles. Two reviewers reviewed the titles of the abstract after the librarian sent it. The librarian sent 462 articles and the relevancy of the articles from the two reviewers were compared for inter-rater reliability. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved by a senior researcher and after the process of the title and abstract review, 139 articles resulted from that. After that, we had a process of inclusion/exclusion of full text and 72 articles resulted in that. When we were done with the 72 articles, we had three coders extract the data to use for a scoping review in a predetermined data charting form. After the 72 articles were selected, we looked at the source of the articles and not surprisingly, most of our articles came from the *Journal of* *VR*. A lot of people in this field publish in the *Journal of VR*, and a few papers were thesis papers.

Most of the 72 articles were surveys, so, 21. This "None" section that has 19 articles, these are theoretical, so this included people who wrote on chapters or who just gave descriptive evidence for the topic of business. There was only one secondary data analysis and not many observation measures. A mixed methods, qualitative section that has nine. As far as the populations that were targeted in these articles, most were businesses in general, and for the Do Not Apply or N/A section that had 12, this included those theoretical articles.

What we found were some preliminary themes, we saw three different themes emerge. The first one is understanding and assessing business needs. So most of the VR representatives looked at how to identify employer needs or assessing employment opportunities or assessing workplace climate. In order to establish a relationship with an employer, VR professionals need to know the needs of the employer. The next one is marketing to businesses so taking the time to make those connections through annual events, consortiums, other venues where VR professionals can engage with businesses and relevant stakeholders to discuss issues pertaining to individuals with disabilities and employment. The last one is explaining the benefits of VR services. So, making VR relevant to our business partners, and maintaining relationships, which often included strategies for supporting businesses and communicating needs. Also, supporting the ADA compliance and workplace accommodations. (We are switching seats.)

>> KATHLEEN MURPHY: Okay, this is the point we're at in this project. So, in our proposal we have this research question, will research liaisons who receive training and support in the use of research-based practices increase the uptake of businesses to improve consumer labor market outcomes, including employment and retention?

We know that we've got a heterogeneous training population. We know that there is no consensus about how to measure their success in the field. There are these three indices -- indicator six -- but those are still being looked at. It's unlikely that a training we can support would actually have such distal affects as those in indicator six, such as labor market penetration or retention. We're thinking through at this point in the project, how can we best support the members of the NET in this dual customer mission in a researched-based way? So, we know this Track C is going to look different than the other two tracks did and frankly we knew this all along and that's why it's subsequent to the other two tracks we reported on yesterday where it was a little clearer. If you're going to talk about the employment of adults with autism, one reason we chose that area is because our staff had already done two systematic reviews on that topic, there is research about that, there are systemic reviews, there are interventions that have been tested.

If we go back to what Amber presented here, this is the nature of the research in this very kind of broad topical domain that we were able to try to boil their training needs down to. I don't want to scroll back again, but we also know there is a general training need on outreach to business, building relationship with business, speaking the language of business, so where we're at now is what we're going to do.

We are going to do a small training module on the results of the scoping review. What the scoping review communicates to the NET members is a historiography of the field. There have been efforts, VR has done outreach to business. This has been studied in some way, this is what people have had to say about it. These are the sources where it's been published, if you want to look more, so we will convey that, but the results of that scoping review are obviously not what they need in order to do their job. So, what we want to do is take that training need, that research finding that is consistent both with the express training needs the NET members themselves told us, and the business representatives with whom they work. One of the themes of the research is that this relationship building matters. What we want to do is put together a training for the NET members that helps them do that, that's a little more hands-on, that helps them build relationships, think through these engagement strategies.

We also know that we've got this heterogenous audience with respect to experience in the field. We're going to look at ways that we can build on that, have partly a didactic training that offers content about building relationships with business, but allows follow-up group discussion where the more tenured members of the audience can do informal mentoring, at least in a follow-up discussion with the newer members to the NET.

We're in the development process, we're still talking to Kathy West-Evans about what this training should look like, we will recruit the NET members to it. We will randomize 14 to a training group, we will put 14 in a control group, the rest will be on a waiting list. We will have a self-paced online module on building relationships to business. There are some out there that have been funded by some of the other RSA-funded TA centers and we're aware of those and looking for a way to work with them, that would work for the NET. As I say, we want to have follow-up group discussions so there can be reactions to those trainings. We're looking at bringing in external facilitators from the world of business who can help facilitate discussions among members of the NET when they do see those existing training resources, for example, how does that ring true for you? What are ways that we can build on this content? Then one thing that we will continue, which was similar to the other two tracks, is we don't want to have a didactic training and leave them and say goodbye, but we will follow-up once a month with that monthly check-in on an individual basis saying, how is it going? What else can we do to help you?

As far as measures, we will do an enrollment survey for members of the NET and then repeat that measure with them at the end of the eight months or so, give them a couple months to do the training, the didactic portion and then the six months of check-ups. And we will ask them to provide us with contact information for businesses they work with so we can talk with the businesses about how did the training have an impact.

I'm hoping that there may be NET members or people who work for VR in business outreach in the audience, because we are very open to your ideas about what would be useful to the National Employment Team. As I say, we don't have the results. That's the conclusion of this presentation, which is kind of "to be continued." And there is our contact information if you don't have your formed thoughts and you don't want to share them now, please do get in touch. I'll end my talking there. Amber, did you have any other comments? No? I think we can move into the questions and answers, comments, any suggestions are very welcome.

>> KATHLEEN MURPHY: The question is, do we look at the state agencies comprehensive needs assessments? We did not and that's a great suggestion. Scoping reviews do often include a gray literature search, where you go beyond just peer-reviewed, and that's not a source we looked at, and I appreciate your suggesting that.

>> KATHLEEN MURPHY: The gentleman is explaining that the state rehabilitation councils have members from the business community that belong to them, and that’s another source of information about business needs. We have talked quite a bit with the members of the Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center who work on technical assistance to VR staff in this area. It has been pointed out a number of times that when you are thinking about VR’s outreach to business, it's not all about the NET, there is more going on there. We didn't turn to those groups, because if we're going to do a training for NET members, if we want to look at the impact of that training, we need to talk with the businesses that the NET works with.

That said, that's obviously not the only impact that VR could have. The nice thing, from a research perspective, is this is a bounded population. We're looking at the NET, there are only so many members, and here are their secondary audience. In the other two research tracks we look at VR supervisors, we train them to be knowledge brokers and then we survey the counselors. So, in trying to design this research track, there are the NET members, we know some of them work in teams, some of them have staff, some of them don't. That's why we thought we were going to skip that staff level in a research design to look at effects, and we’re going to go right to the businesses.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Away from mic)

>> KATHLEEN MURPHY: It’s Kelly Haines from the Institute for Community Inclusion, and ICI under previous funding, did previous work with the NET including surveying them about some of their needs and how do they go about doing their jobs. There is an article, I know, is it in JVR? Yes, it did, and actually, we have publicized it in a newsletter, and it was an open access link. Do you remember what month and year it is in JVR? It was published in 2018 in the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* and it’s a nice summary of what’s going on with the NET. You actually got a better response rate, so at the time, it was a more comprehensive look, although it coheres with what we found. So, Kelly was pointing out that one thing that would be important to ask is how much time do the NET members have to do business engagement and how much time are they spending out in the field? Because if the idea is we are going to do this training on building relationships with business, and they know already from the previous ICI survey that they have a lot of other responsibilities, how much impact can your training have if they're not positioned to put it into practice?

A long, long time ago, I was in university settings, teaching courses and I was always told wait ten seconds, people need time to formulate thoughts or build up courage. But when it's a Friday afternoon, I think we can go ahead and close if no one else has anything they want to offer. We do want to give a resounding thanks, the KTER Center does, to the VR Summit. This has been a really great opportunity and we’ve really appreciated being able to have our State of the Science, and to be able to reach all of you.