

Creating TANF and Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Partnerships

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Some TANF recipients may have disabilities that would qualify them for the specialized employment preparation services Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies provide. TANF recipients may seek out VR services on their own, or be referred to VR by a TANF case manager on his or her own accord, however, because VR is an unfamiliar service system, few may be inclined to do so. Creating a formal partnership between the agencies can ensure that all TANF recipients who can benefit from VR services have access to them. Though linking the services of these two agencies through formal cooperative agreements is not a widespread strategy, some states have had such partnerships in place for many years and other states are developing them. This practice brief explores the benefits and challenges of linking TANF and VR services, describes partnerships that have been formed in Vermont and Iowa, then discusses key features that appear to be critical to developing a successful partnership.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of the nation's cash assistance system into a temporary assistance system that includes work requirements, sanctions for noncompliance, and time limits has increased the importance of providing services that will help all TANF recipients, including those living with a disability, quickly obtain and maintain competitive employment. TANF employment programs typically offer job search assistance, case management to monitor participation in required program activities and, to varying degrees, opportunities to participate in work experience, community service, and vocational education programs. Individuals living with disabilities, however, may have service needs that go beyond those that TANF programs typically provide. Examples include intensive case management, rehabilitation services, assistive technologies, substance abuse and mental health treatment, counseling, and job matching and coaching. While some TANF programs help recipients access mental health and substance abuse treatment and provide more intensive case management to help recipients address personal and family challenges, most don't have the resources or expertise to provide the full array of services individuals living with disabilities might need to succeed in the workplace. One way to make these services available is to link TANF recipients with agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) that specialize in providing these services.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

This is one of four practice briefs examining strategies TANF agencies may consider implementing to help TANF recipients living with a disability to realize their full employment potential. Other briefs in the series include, *Conducting In-Depth Assessments, Creating Work Opportunities, and Providing Specialized Personal and Work-Based Support*. These briefs draw on case studies of nine programs that have been implemented by states or county welfare agencies to provide specialized services to TANF recipients living with a disability who have not succeeded in traditional job search programs. None of these programs has been rigorously evaluated, thus, their effectiveness remains unknown. Still, they provide important information on program design and implementation that program administrators can use to craft strategies that take into account their program goals and the unique features of their TANF caseload. These briefs were completed by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. under contract to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Administration for Children and Families.

VR agencies provide employment-related services to people with physical limitations, mental health problems, and learning disabilities, with the ultimate goal of helping them reach their full employment potential. The Rehabilitation Services Administration within the U.S. Department of Education governs the VR program, but employees of state VR agencies provide services to individuals. Pursuant to federal guidelines, individuals must have a documented disability and a vocational objective (desire to become employed) to be eligible for VR services. All applicants for services receive an extensive assessment and are classified into one of three categories based on the severity of their disability—(1) most severely disabled, (2) severely disabled, or (3) other. If funds are not available to serve all recipients, this ranking is used to determine the order in which clients receive services; individuals in category 1 receive priority followed by individuals in category 2. There are few constraints on the types of services VR clients may receive; anything that will help clients advance toward their employment goals can be supported with VR funds. Each client works with a VR counselor to develop an individualized plan for employment that recognizes their skills, strengths, challenges, and goals and includes the actions that the client and the VR counselor will take to implement the plan. Participation in VR services is entirely voluntary.

THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF CREATING TANF AND VR PARTNERSHIPS

Cooperative arrangements between TANF and VR agencies can provide TANF recipients living with disabilities access to services and expertise the TANF agency itself does not provide. In addition, even if TANF recipients may not be able to access VR services immediately because of capacity issues, collaboration between the two agencies may allow TANF clients living with disabilities to benefit from the expertise of VR staff while awaiting more intensive VR services. But forging linkages is not an easy task. TANF and VR are often administered by different state agencies, serve different populations and approach the task of helping individuals find employment differently.

Potential Benefits

Well-developed partnerships between the TANF agency and VR can expand the range and improve the quality of services available to TANF recipients living with a disability. Key benefits include: (1) access to highly-skilled and trained staff, (2) access to specialized vocational assessments, and (3) access to specialized resources.

Access to highly-skilled and trained staff. At VR, all counselors are required to have qualifications that meet state requirements (typically, a completed or in-progress master's degree in rehabilitative counseling or a related discipline leading to a certification as a rehabilitation counselor). VR counselors work exclusively and daily with clients with disabilities, and have extensive experience finding jobs for and supporting clients through the transition to work. Given this training, VR staff may be more appropriately equipped to manage a TANF recipient's case if his or her primary employment barrier is related to a disability. If states do not want VR counselors to assume TANF case management responsibilities (because of resource constraints or other concerns), VR staff still may be able to provide expert advice or training to TANF case managers on how to best assist clients living with disabilities.

RATIONALE FOR ENGAGING TANF RECIPIENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN WORK ACTIVITIES

Beginning in the early 1990's, prior to the creation of TANF, states began expanding the pool of recipients expected to participate in work-related activities, with some states moving towards universal engagement where all recipients are expected to participate in activities that will prepare them for work. Although federal rules don't include exceptions or modified requirements for TANF recipients living with a disability, states that have adopted a model of universal engagement often permit recipients with personal and family challenges, including, but not limited to, those living with a disability, to participate in a broader range of activities or for a reduced number of hours, acknowledging that their participation may not be sufficient to count toward the state's work participation rate.¹ The reasons for pursuing a universal engagement strategy include: (1) with time limits on the receipt of cash assistance, recipients cannot expect to rely on TANF in the long run; (2) paid employment is the surest path for achieving self-sufficiency for all, including recipients living with a disability; (3) the TANF system has an employment infrastructure in place that can be expanded and adapted to meet the needs of recipients who need more intensive services and employment accommodations; and (4) TANF agencies, like all public agencies, are required by the Americans with Disabilities Act to provide opportunities for recipients living with a disability to benefit from all the programs, services and activities they offer.

Access to specialized vocational assessments.

VR has the resources and expertise to provide detailed and comprehensive assessments of client abilities and interests. (See *Completing In-depth Assessments*, the first practice brief in this series for a detailed discussion of how specialized vocational assessments are used to help TANF recipients develop an employment plan.) By law, VR must assess all applicants to determine the existence of and severity of disabilities within 60 days of a client's application for services, regardless of whether services are eventually provided. The results of these assessments can help TANF case managers develop realistic expectations and an appropriate service plan for their clients. Typically, VR has strong relationships with providers in the community who can contribute efficiently to the assessment process. For instance, if an assessment requires a medical diagnosis, VR might refer the client to a medical provider located at the VR agency or somewhere convenient to the client. VR can also pay for psychological assessments to gather more detailed information on a recipient's disability and how it might impact the amount and kind of work he or she can do, and what accommodations or supports might be needed.

Access to specialized employment-related resources.

A key advantage to a partnership between TANF and VR is that VR can provide services that TANF agencies do not offer, either because they are not supported by TANF funding or are not countable toward the federal TANF work participation requirements. VR typically supports a wide range of services, including assessment, assistive technology and devices, community-based rehabilitation programs, individualized job development, job skills training, job coaching, treatment, counseling, and ongoing follow-up support. In short, VR can fund any service or support that will help individuals living with a disability to overcome their impediment to employment. These can be a substantial supplement to the standard employment supports and child care and transportation assistance that most TANF agencies provide.

Potential Challenges

States seeking to forge partnerships between their TANF and VR agencies may experience and need to devise strategies to overcome a variety of implementation challenges, including: (1) cultural differences between agencies, (2) gaps in staff knowledge and skills, (3) waiting lists for VR services, (4) facilitating cross-agency communication, and (5) balancing state and local needs.

Cultural differences between agencies. Successful collaboration between TANF and VR can be impeded by divergent agency approaches to client services. First, VR is a voluntary program, while participation in TANF work activities is mandatory. TANF agencies

enforce financial penalties on clients for noncompliance with required program activities, but VR does not impose any participation requirements or penalties. Rather, VR's mission is to help those clients who *want* the help and the agency simply discontinues services for those who stop participating. A second difference in service approach pertains to outreach. Because VR is a voluntary program and its clients must have a vocational goal to be eligible for services, VR clients are generally motivated to seek employment and the agency needs to do little in the way of client outreach. In contrast, because TANF clients are required to participate in work activities in exchange for cash assistance, not all are self-motivated. TANF programs spend considerable resources motivating clients to participate in an effort to avoid financial consequences for failing to engage a minimum percentage of TANF clients. Finally, TANF and VR agencies have somewhat different philosophies about the path to successful employment. TANF agencies generally utilize a work-first approach and encourage clients to take any appropriate job that will move them off welfare. In contrast, VR focuses on assisting clients to identify and prepare for a career path. VR often takes more time to help clients identify goals and prepare for employment, while TANF agencies tend towards a fast track to employment.

Gaps in staff knowledge and skills. Differences in the training and experience of TANF and VR frontline workers is a challenge related to, but distinct from, the problem of cultural differences between the two agencies. VR staff are not accustomed to many of the challenges facing TANF recipients because there are no financial eligibility criteria for VR and the regular caseload is not necessarily low-income. VR counselors also are not accustomed to working with people who are mandated to participate in work activities, and this difference affects client attitudes and may require a different approach to services. On the flip side, TANF agency staff typically are not trained to identify individuals living with disabilities, particularly more hidden disabilities such as learning disabilities or mental health issues.

Waiting lists for VR services. When funding constrains VR from being able to serve all eligible applicants, the agency must by federal law serve them according to an "order of selection." Clients with the most significant disabilities are served first, followed by those with moderately significant disabilities and then other eligible clients. The amount of time that clients in the latter categories must wait to receive services varies by state according to the resources available and the number of eligible applicants in each category. Waiting lists for services may be long, and those clients without significant disabilities may never receive VR services. Clients on the waiting list for VR services may continue to receive TANF employment services, however, they may not be sufficient to help recipients find employ-

ment at a level that allows them to end their dependence on welfare. In such cases, while they await services, their lifetime welfare time clocks continue to tick.

Facilitating cross-agency communication. A well-intentioned and efficiently implemented partnership could be limited in the long term by limited and poor communication between the two agencies. Historically, staff from TANF and VR agencies have had very little interaction with each other. Thus, relationships need to be built and procedures developed to facilitate cross-agency communication. In addition, the agencies typically have different management information systems (MIS) and are not able to access each other's data on the same client, making personal relationships among staff critical. This can slow the recordkeeping process and the delivery of services to clients. Thus, in order to be successful, agencies need to devise ways to share information and adapt to each agency's data collection requirements.

Balancing state prescription and local discretion. Implementing a new partnership requires state TANF and VR agencies to foster ongoing acceptance and enthusiasm among local frontline staff. This creates the challenge of communicating the state's vision for the program to local staff while still allowing frontline supervisors and workers to have some authority over the implementation in a practical way, given the local environment and client population. Too much direction from the state can constrain local agencies in a way that hampers their efforts to serve clients, but too little direction can leave local agencies floundering and lead to inconsistencies across the state.

STATE PROGRAM EXAMPLES

Five of the nine sites included in this study of strategies to increase employment among TANF recipients living with a disability have developed partnerships between their TANF and VR agencies. Here we describe the initiatives in two sites to provide examples of partnerships at different stages of development and using different approaches. Vermont's six-year partnership provides an example of a mature and well-developed relationship. Iowa provides insight into the early challenges states may face as they try to get such a partnership off the ground.

Vermont: The Reach Up/VR Partnership

The partnership between Vermont's TANF program, known as Reach Up (RU), and the state VR agency is built upon a belief that, with the right assistance and resources, TANF recipients living with a disability can participate in work or work activities. The partnership, initiated by the TANF agency in 2001, is intended to help clients with documented disabilities find and keep employment. Recipients with more severe disabilities

initially receive assistance with applying for SSI and are then encouraged to take advantage of the assistance VR provides to help them find and maintain employment. Key features of the initiative include: (1) dedicated VR counselors with small caseloads, (2) a collaborative referral process, (3) individualized employment support, and (4) assistance with SSI applications.

KEY FACTS: VERMONT VR REACH UP PROGRAM

Characteristics of TANF VR Participants

- Less likely to have completed high school than participants in the VR general program, and half as likely to have had post-secondary schooling
- More likely to have hidden disabilities—cognitive or psychiatric—that may have gone undiagnosed and untreated
- Many have disabilities severe enough to qualify them for Social Security Administration disability benefits
- Many have children with serious disabilities or behavioral issues

Program Accomplishments

- 1,218 recipients served in state fiscal year 2006
- Average monthly caseload of 500 recipients
- Typical service duration of 6 to 24 months
- 60-70 TANF case closures per year due to paid employment
- Fewer than 50 per year sanctioned for nonparticipation
- More than one-third cases in any month involved in the SSI application process

VR counselors dedicated to serving Reach Up recipients. Dedicated VR/RU counselors, located in each of the state's 12 regions, have primary responsibility for providing VR services to TANF recipients living with a disability. The counselors are employees of the VR agency, but are dedicated solely to working with TANF clients. They serve the dual role of VR counselor and TANF case manager, meaning that they are responsible for working with clients to assess their career interests and abilities, provide vocational guidance and support, develop and implement an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE), monitor program participation, address personal and family challenges, help them obtain services to alleviate logistical challenges (e.g., child

care and transportation), and help them find and maintain employment. These specialized VR/RU counselors have smaller caseloads (40 clients each, versus the usual RU caseload size of 50-60 and the VR caseload size of 100-130 or greater).

Collaborative referral process. Vermont uses a well-established, collaborative process to identify TANF recipients who are appropriate candidates to be served by VR. Staff from each local office meet regularly to consider the circumstances and needs of TANF recipients whose needs are not being met through the RU program. Recipients are deemed appropriate for a VR referral if there is sufficient evidence they are living with a disability and they are motivated to participate in a work program. If space is not available on the VR caseload, the VR/RU counselor provides the RU case managers with guidance on appropriate strategies and services they can implement until space becomes available. TANF clients whose disabilities are less severe or who need a less-intensive level of service may be referred to VR but continue working with their original RU case manager. They would then have access to all the services VR provides but would be assigned a VR counselor who has a larger caseload than the VR/RU counselor.

Individualized employment support. Each VR/RU counselor is supported by an employment specialist that works with clients to help them identify their job interests, search for employment (resume development, interviewing skills, etc.), match them with potential positions where their barriers are either not a problem or can be accommodated, and provide support to help them succeed at work. The VR/RU employment specialist encourages employers to accept program participants on a trial basis, with the expectation that the employer will hire these workers if their performance during the trial period is satisfactory. Clients may also participate in a paid work experience program that is operated by the state Department of Labor, but participation in this program is reserved for participants who are job ready and already have a strong attendance history. The most common employment path is for clients to begin in an unpaid work experience position and then move directly into competitive employment. The time it takes to move from unpaid to paid work varies, depending on an individual's skill level and the number and severity of the personal and family challenges they face. Staff from VR aim to help TANF recipients meet their work requirement, but TANF recipients that are referred to VR may also receive a temporary exemption from the work requirement or may have their work requirement modified. The state took this approach so that VR would not feel constrained in its efforts to address client barriers and build client strengths. The expectation is that if services are individualized and recipients' needs addressed, clients will have a greater chance of eventually meeting their

work requirements. RU staff address any issues related to noncompliance.

THE PREVALENCE OF DISABILITIES AMONG TANF RECIPIENTS

Since the creation of TANF, numerous studies have estimated the prevalence of personal and family challenges, including disabilities, among the TANF population. While the estimates of the fraction of the recipients living with a disability are not consistent across these studies, they all suggest that a substantial portion of the TANF caseload is living with a disability. While the majority of these recipients eventually may be able to find and sustain employment, they may need more specialized assistance and take more time to do so. The disabilities that are reported most commonly among TANF recipients are mental health conditions, learning disabilities and physical health problems. Results from a common survey fielded in six states found that the fraction of TANF recipients reporting a mental health condition ranged from 21 to 41 percent, a learning disability ranged from 8 to 18 percent, and a physical health condition ranged from 16 to 26 percent. Across the six states, recipients with physical and mental health conditions were significantly less likely to be employed than those without these conditions.² A recent study that uses the Survey of Income and program Participation (SIPP) to compare the characteristics of TANF recipients before and after the implementation of TANF found that the proportion of TANF recipients reporting a work-limiting condition has increased over time. For example, in 1996, 16 percent reported a work-limiting condition compared to 21 percent in 2007.³

Assistance with SSI applications. In some cases, the VR assessment may reveal disabilities that are severe enough to qualify for SSI benefits. In these instances, staff at VR help clients navigate the SSI application and appeals processes. SSI provides these individuals with greater income support for a longer period of time. SSI may provide TANF recipients with more serious disabilities the time they need to obtain assistance that can help to stabilize their current situation, making work more feasible in the future. In Vermont, one quarter of the 1,000 cases referred to the specialized VR/RU caseload each year move forward with an SSI application, and approximately 94 percent of those referrals are ultimately awarded SSI benefits (though this process can take up to 18 months).

Iowa: The Promise Jobs Disability Specialist Initiative

The primary goal of Iowa's TANF/VR Disability Specialist Initiative is to strengthen employment services for TANF recipients with disabilities and to help them become self-sufficient through employment. The initiative, which began as a pilot project in Sioux City and was implemented statewide in July 2006, operates as a partnership between Promise Jobs (PJ), the state's TANF employment program operated by the Iowa Workforce Development agency, and the state VR agency. The initiative has two key components, TANF disability specialists and specialized staff training. The initiative is still in the early stages of development and has not yet fully addressed the VR waiting list challenge.

TANF disability specialists. PJ hired 8 disability specialists to provide services to TANF recipients. In some regions, the specialists have their own caseloads of TANF clients and in others they advise traditional PJ case managers. The intent of the program is that case-carrying disability specialists will have maximum caseloads of 40-60 TANF clients (versus 100 to 150 for traditional PJ case managers). Clients enrolled in the initiative receive intensive case management, and those who appear eligible for VR services are referred for a VR eligibility assessment. The state VR agency has designated counselors to work with PJ clients referred to VR, and these counselors will have smaller caseloads than other VR counselors. Aside from specialized counselors with smaller caseloads, TANF clients who are referred to VR receive the same services as other VR clients in Iowa.

Specialized staff training. Iowa hired a consultant, Disability Consulting, LC, specifically to tailor its curriculum for training the new disability specialists. The research-based curriculum, "Tools That Answer the Needs of Frontline Workers," covers case management techniques, disability identification and assessment, and legal and employment issues. The curriculum was designed to give front-line case managers some background on how to identify and address the range of disabilities clients may have, and provide some assessment tools. It had been previously tested and delivered in other states, and the curriculum developer tailored the training modules to meet Iowa's needs. Most of the staff hired to be disability specialists had little background in working with clients living with disabilities, although many had case management experience. After completing the 10-day course, the disability specialists are expected to provide assistance to other TANF staff on how to respond to the needs of TANF clients with disabilities. The module-based training can be modified to meet a state's specific needs.

SPECIALIZED STAFF TRAINING: *Tools that Answer the Needs of Frontline Workers*

- Introduction
- Rapport, trust, relationship building
- Information gathering, communication
- Plan development
- Plan implementation and monitoring
- General disability
- Mental health
- Learning disabilities and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders
- Intellectual disabilities
- Traumatic brain injuries
- Chronic health conditions and physical disabilities
- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Children and family members with disabilities
- Multiple issues
- Accessing resources
- Managing your work
- Quality assurance, ethics, confidentiality
- State resources
- National resources

Tools that Answer the Needs of Frontline Workers was created by Disability Consulting LC through the Small Business Innovation Research Program for the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.⁴

Addressing waiting lists for VR services. As of May 2007, Iowa's VR waiting list was about 4,000 clients, with 3,700 in the second or "significantly disabled" category. Most TANF recipients referred to the Disability Specialist Initiative are in the second ("significantly disabled") or third ("other eligible") category, so clients participating in the initiative have not yet been able to receive the full range of VR services for which they may be eligible. The services that TANF case managers provide to TANF clients referred to the Disability Specialist Initiative are being funded with state TANF Maintenance of Effort dollars and will be used to help the state draw down additional federal VR funds which should help reduce the waiting list. Historically, the state legislature has not appropriated enough funds to allow the state VR agency to draw down its full federal match. Any time the specialists spend with clients up until VR eligibility is confirmed or the client begins receiving VR services (that is, time a VR counselor would otherwise have spent with those

clients) is eligible to be counted toward the federal match.

KEY PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Partnerships between TANF and VR agencies may be structured in many different ways. For example, in Vermont clients referred to the initiative are assigned to a single worker who performs both TANF case manager and VR counselor functions; while in Iowa clients referred to the initiative have a specially-trained TANF case manager and eventually a separate VR counselor. For a partnership to work well, however, it is important that it have certain key features, regardless of the specific structure.

Formal agreement on specialized roles and responsibilities. A clearly-defined agreement about the scope and structure of services to be delivered is a key feature of both the Iowa and Vermont initiatives, and based on the experience of these two states appears to be essential for a high-functioning partnership between two diverse agencies such as TANF and VR. Formal agreements can help minimize confusion over each agency's expected roles and responsibilities and can help avoid turf battles. Agencies can use different mechanisms to establish formal agreements. In Vermont, the TANF and VR agencies formally outlined their roles and responsibilities, as well as the funding level, in an explicit interagency agreement. The agreement lays out the TANF agency's expectations for VR, including an understanding that VR will serve 1,000 TANF clients within each one-year period. It also specifies that the specialized caseload size will not be greater than 40 clients per VR/RU counselor, and that the TANF agency will handle all issues of client non-compliance. In Iowa, the TANF agency developed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) that was signed by the TANF, VR, and workforce agencies to govern their participation in the partnership. Many Iowa TANF caseworkers are co-located with workforce one-stop centers and VR staff, so the staff of the three agencies already collaborate frequently.

Clearly defined performance standards. In addition to defining roles and responsibilities, it is important to define expectations with respect to outcomes so that each agency shares a common understanding of the goals of the initiative, puts forth its best effort to meet those goals, and can be held accountable to established standards. Vermont's annual contract between TANF and VR specifies that VR will provide quarterly reports to the TANF agency, and that VR performance will be judged on the number of rehabilitations, client participation rate, and duration of services. Iowa is in the process of developing performance measures that will eventually be woven into the MOA.

Small caseloads. A key feature of both the Vermont and Iowa partnerships is reduced caseloads for staff that exclusively serve TANF recipients living with disabilities. Small caseloads in these types of initiatives contribute to enhanced services because such TANF clients have a variety of needs that may require substantial time and attention to address. In Vermont, the maximum caseload size for the specialized VR/RU counselors is 40. In Iowa, though the partnership is still evolving, the expectation is that disability specialists will carry caseloads of 40 to 60 TANF clients.

Shared responsibility for case planning and coordination. For partnerships to work well, each agency must understand the other's mission and approach to working with clients. VR must understand the TANF program's expectations of clients, and TANF must keep informed about the services provided to the client and the client's participation and progress. The latter is particularly salient because TANF agencies alone have the authority to sanction clients for noncompliance. In addition, agencies must coordinate to avoid duplication of services and instead ensure that the supports each agency provides complement each other.

In both Iowa and Vermont, there was some degree of shared responsibility between TANF and VR for case planning and coordination. In Vermont, the decision to transfer a TANF client to the specialized VR/RU caseload is made jointly between the TANF case managers, a TANF supervisor, and the specialized VR/RU counselor. In Iowa, clients have a designated TANF case manager and a designated VR counselor who coordinate service planning and case management, with each contributing the services, resources, and training that their agency can offer the client.

Adequate funding. An initiative that involves more than simple referrals from TANF to VR will likely require an infusion of funds to implement. For Vermont, this funding came in the form of a contractually governed grant from TANF to VR. The TANF agency provides \$1.4 million per year to VR, which supports 12 full-time equivalent positions for VR/RU counselors who serve TANF clients exclusively (one for each of the state's 12 regions), as well as employment specialists to assist the counselors, and two state-level program coordinators. The grant also supports psychological assessments for clients on the specialized caseload, as well as SSI assistants who process SSI application paperwork for TANF clients referred to VR and determined by assessments to be likely SSI candidates. Vermont uses VR money to cover services that TANF does not cover, such as supported work and workplace accommodations, while directing TANF funds to cover supportive services like childcare, transportation, and work clothes.

In Iowa, the Disability Specialist Initiative's first year was funded by a \$600,000 legislative appropriation. This funding supports the salaries and overhead costs for 8 specialized TANF disability specialists to serve clients living with disabilities in the state's 16 administrative regions, and funded in-depth training (provided by a contracted trainer) for them.

CONCLUSION

Multiple studies have found that a substantial portion of TANF clients lives with a disability, suggesting that many of them could benefit from VR services. Most notably, they gain access to services not available through the TANF agency and also to the expertise of staff that are highly skilled and trained in the area of disabilities. In addition to direct client benefits, there also are clear advantages of a partnership between the agencies themselves. The TANF agency can save resources it otherwise would have expended on client assessments and certain types of services, and VR may be able to use the time that TANF staff spend with clients eligible for VR services to draw down additional federal funds. Partnerships between agencies can be structured in many ways, though the experiences of Iowa and Vermont suggest that some key ingredients to a successful partnership are small caseload sizes, highly-trained staff, and formal interagency agreements and performance standards. These common elements are a possible starting point for other states wishing to initiate a linkage between their TANF and VR agencies.

While the promising practices and challenges described in this practice brief may inform some conversations about how to form such linkages, states must also consider their own unique context and caseload characteristics when devising an approach that is optimal for their agencies.

NOTES

¹Kauff, Jacqueline, Michelle K. Derr, and LaDonna Pavetti. "A Study of Work Participation and Full Engagement Strategies." Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., September 2004.

²Hauan, Susan and Douglas, Sarah. "Potential Liabilities Among TANF Recipients: A Synthesis of Data from Six State TANF Caseload Studies." Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2004.

³Bavier, Richard. "Prevalence and Dynamics of Disadvantaged Recipients in the TANF Caseload." Washington, D.C.: Office of Management and Budget. September 2007.

⁴ Additional information on *Tools that Answer the Needs of Frontline Workers* can be obtained from Amy Desenberg-Wines via e-mail, aw4113@earthlink.net, or via telephone (515) 981-4113.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND SITE SELECTION

This study was conducted by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. under contract to the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). There were two objectives of the study. The first was to provide TANF program administrators with information on strategies they could consider implementing to help TANF recipients living with a disability reach their full employment potential. (For purposes of the study, a disability was defined as any mental, physical, or cognitive limitation that has the potential to affect TANF recipients' employment prospects.) The second was to identify potential opportunities to advance our understanding of the most effective strategies for helping TANF recipients living with a disability find and sustain paid employment through rigorous random assignment evaluations.

To accomplish these objectives, MPR conducted a process and implementation analysis in nine sites utilizing qualitative case study methods. To identify sites for the study, MPR attempted to uncover as many programs as possible using four sources of information: (1) available documents (such as reports, journal and Internet articles, and newsletters); (2) recommendations from TANF and disability experts; (3) recommendations from federal officials; and (4) ongoing MPR studies for DHHS on TANF employment programs and for the Social Security Administration (SSA) on promising strategies for promoting employment among persons with disabilities. From the full list of programs, MPR and DHHS collaboratively selected a smaller set that would likely be of most interest to other states and localities, as well as be most feasible to implement. We conducted in-depth, in-person visits to seven sites and telephone interviews with program administrators and staff in two. The site visits and telephone interviews were structured to gather detailed information on program design and implementation, focusing on the issues that would be of most interest to program administrators.