

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES
REHABILITATIVE SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM
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TO : STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (GENERAL)
STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (BLIND)
PROTECTION & ADVOCACY OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS PROGRAMS
CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
AMERICAN INDIAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAMS
RSA SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM
CONSUMER ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

SUBJECT: An Evaluation of the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Program (AIVRS), Final Report

CONTENT: Below is a discussion of the Final Report on the *Evaluation of the American
Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program*, a descriptive study conducted
by Development Associates, Inc. under contract to the Rehabilitation Services
Administration (RSA) of the U.S. Department of Education. This study can be
found at the Rehabilitation Services Administration's Web site at:

www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/RSA/Research/studies/index.html

The AIVRS program provides grants to governing bodies of Indian tribes located on Federal and State reservations and to consortia of such governing bodies to provide vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to American Indians with disabilities residing on or near such reservations. Below are the objectives of the study.

1. Describe and analyze the characteristics, services received, and outcomes of Native Americans with disabilities.
2. Identify the degree to which Native Americans are not served or are underserved in the AIVRS projects' services areas.
3. Describe the organizational structures and management of the projects.
4. Describe the projects' vocational rehabilitation (VR) practices, regarding: vocational assessment, determining eligibility for services, developing plans for services, fostering consumer choice, and delivering services.
5. Identify the cost-effectiveness of established AIVRS projects.
6. Describe the economic and resource environments of the projects.
7. Identify best practices and make recommendations for program Improvement.

The evaluation included several data collection activities:

1. A mail survey to the 54 AIVRS projects with funding in FY1999 and FY2000;
2. Site visits to 29 of those projects including: Interviews with project, tribal and State VR agency personnel, a focus group with project staff members and service record reviews of 30 closed records and 20 open records;
3. Telephone interviews with 3 other AIVRS project directors;
4. Comparison of data from AIVRS service records with State VR service records data.

Among the findings of the evaluation were:

Community Contexts

- A typical project (as defined by the median value) had a service area of 2,265 square miles and a Native American population in that area of 7,250.
- A typical consumer of an AIVRS project (also defined by the median) lived 43 miles from the closest State VR office and 52 miles from an urban area with a range of human service providers.
- The median unemployment rate in the AIVRS projects' service areas was nearly five times as high as the median rate in surrounding areas (32.5 percent versus 6.6 percent).

Consumer Population

- A typical project served 64 consumers in the year and 50 consumers at one time.
- Substance abuse was the most common disability of those consumers who were served.

Organizational Structure and Management

- The most common organizational locations for AIVRS projects were in a separate department or in the education department.
- AIVRS service records were more likely to include information on consumer backgrounds, consumer choice, and eligibility than information on service plans, consumer outcomes, and consumer costs.
- The most common implementation problems for AIVRS projects were recruiting and retaining staff, dealing with tribal governments, and developing methods and systems of operation.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

- According to service record data, the services most often received by AIVRS consumers were vocational counseling and guidance, vocational assessments, medical consultation and treatment, and substance abuse services. In addition, AIVRS projects indicated that they provided transportation services to many consumers.

Consumer Outcomes

- The mail survey of the projects found that 64 percent of AIVRS consumers who received services under an Individual Plan of Employment (IPE) and whose cases were closed between October 1, 1999 and September 30, 2000 had successful employment outcomes.
- The review of closed case records found that of all individuals who left the AIVRS program (including those not eligible and who did not receive any services under an IPE) , 25 percent had successful employment outcomes. This is comparable to the rate for Native Americans served by State VR agencies
- At the project level, the professional staffs' years of vocational rehabilitation experience was positively related to the proportion of successful outcomes. The number of years that projects had received federal funding was positively related to the number of successful outcomes.

Costs

- More established AIVRS projects were more cost-effective than the newer projects.

Features Identified as Effective

- Common effective features of AIVRS projects according to project directors were cultural sensitivity to consumers, consumer involvement in planning services, a consumer-centered approach, teamwork among staff, effective coordination with other agencies, cost-sharing, and extensive staff training.

Selected Conclusions

1. There is a very significant need for vocational rehabilitation (VR) services for Native Americans on or near Indian reservations.
2. Tribal governments offer a unique resource for providing VR services to Native Americans on or near Indian reservations
3. AIVRS projects face considerable challenges in providing VR services due to geographic, economic, and cultural factors.
4. Many AIVRS projects face challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified staff members and in developing appropriate relationships with their tribal governments.
5. AIVRS projects are generally applying established VR principles and methods to providing services.
6. The quality and completeness of case records is satisfactory at a majority of AIVRS projects, but there are record-keeping weaknesses at a number of projects.
7. The functioning of AIVRS project advisory groups could be strengthened.
8. AIVRS projects are generating appropriate levels of successful employment outcomes at reasonable costs.
9. AIVRS projects in geographically remote areas face the most challenges.

If you have any questions concerning the Final Report, please call Dr. Harold Kay, Director of Evaluation, at 202-205-9883.

Joanne Wilson
Commissioner

Attachment

CC: CSAVR
CANAR