

## Improving Employment Outcomes by Connecting With Businesses

### What Were We Trying to Learn?

This study sought to determine whether contact with VR agencies was associated with employers' attitudes towards individuals with BVI and employers' hiring history or intent to hire such individuals in the future. Although thought to be important, no studies have empirically documented the impact of VR agency engagement with employers.

### What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

Relationships between VR agencies and employers were found to positively affect employment outcomes for and attitudes toward individuals with BVI in a number of ways:

- 1. Previous Hires** – Employers who had contact with VR were more likely to have previously hired someone with BVI.
- 2. Intent to Hire** – Employers who had contact with VR, and especially those who reported an ongoing relationship with a VR agency, were more likely to plan to hire someone with BVI in the future.
- 3. Employer Attitudes** – Employers who had contact with VR that included specific discussions of BVI were more likely to have a positive attitude about people with BVI as employees, with employers who reported ongoing relationships having the most positive attitudes.
- 4. Decision to Hire** – Employers gave a number of reasons for hiring employees with BVI. By far the most commonly reported reason was that the person was qualified for the job or the best candidate. Other reasons were that the employer had empathy or compassion for the person and the employer wanted to provide equal opportunity.

### Research Takeaway

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies are increasingly focused on building and maintaining employer relationships in order to support employment of individuals with disabilities. Employers were surveyed about their interactions with VR and their hiring of people who are blind or visually impaired (BVI). Employers who reported contact with VR agencies were more likely to have hired an individual with BVI and to intend to hire from among this population in the future. These results provide empirical support for the importance of VR professionals making and maintaining relationships with employers.

**The results of this study provide strong evidence for the importance of building relationships with businesses.** Building and maintaining ongoing relationships with businesses may improve employers' attitudes towards, and hiring behaviors associated with, individuals with BVI.

### How Do These Findings Relate to Me as a Service Provider?

- 1. Cultivate connections with employers.** Contact between VR and employers is important, and the impact of a strong, ongoing relationship may be even more beneficial. VR professionals who build and maintain connections with employers can help hiring managers develop a more positive outlook toward hiring individuals with BVI.

2. **Talk to employers about BVI.** VR professionals should specifically discuss individuals who are BVI with employers, especially if their VR agency serves consumers with a variety of disabilities. Hiring managers need specific information about how a person who is BVI can thrive in the workplace, and VR professionals should be prepared to answer employers' questions. Providing BVI-specific information may improve employers' attitudes toward this population.

## How Was This Project Carried Out?

We conducted an online survey with 382 employers, including hiring managers, executives, and human resources personnel, from across the country. We asked about their interactions with VR, their history of hiring and intent to hire people with BVI, and their attitudes towards these individuals as employees.

## Learn More

Findings taken from the following article:

McDonnall, M. C. (2017). The relationship between employer contact with vocational rehabilitation and hiring decisions about individuals who are blind or visually impaired. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 83(1), 50-58.

For more information about this project, including links to a practice guide, online short courses, and other publications, visit the project overview page: [Effectiveness of VR Agency-Employer Interaction Practices](#).

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