

Welcome to HireGround

Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities produces this newsletter expressly for our Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) professional audience. We hope that these articles and practical tips will be of value to you as we continue our relationship and work with participants. Our goal is to achieve quality employment, independence and disability determination outcomes through our integrated services, partnerships and innovation.

Pre-Employment Transition Services Resource Updates

To expand the availability of Pre-Employment Transition Services for Ohio students with disabilities, Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) has partnered with Ohio's Centers for Independent Living (CILs), Community Centers for the Deaf (CCDs) and Sight Centers, as well as several county boards of developmental disabilities. These contracts, effective October 1, 2017, are intended to help students begin to identify career interests. They are available to students who are currently eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, and also to those who are potentially eligible but have not yet applied for services.

In addition, OOD has recently created a transition-specific page on its website for easy access to fact sheets, guidance and other transition resources. This can be found under the new [Transition Students tab on OOD's website](#). Details regarding the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services include service maps and a fact sheet. Also included is a form titled [Request for Pre-Employment Transition Services](#), which educators should use to request services for potentially eligible students.

Fast Track Moves from Successful Pilot to Statewide Effort

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program was designed to make sure that individuals with disabilities have access to extensive career counseling and other services that may be necessary to assist them to become successfully employed. OOD recognizes that some individuals with disabilities seeking services, such as people with significant work experience or those already working, may benefit from quicker access and may need fewer services. This is why in April 2017, OOD began a Fast Track pilot. This program was designed to identify applicants who would benefit from this model, because they need a minimal number of services or they were ready for employment. A select group of applicants who were either employed at application or had a recent positive past work history were screened to be part of the pilot. The goal was to speed up the traditional process in order to place these individuals in employment within 90 days of their application or get them into services as quickly as possible so that they could maintain their current job.

Six VR teams participated in the pilot, which ran from April 1 to September 1. During the pilot, the median time from application to employment was 31.5 days, which was well below the goal of 90 days.

Beginning in October, all staff were trained on the new Fast Track procedure, which went into effect on October 27, 2017. OOD is very excited to see the positive effects of this process as it plays out on a statewide level.

New Online Resources from BSVI

BSVI's [2018 Vision Loss and Hearing Loss Resources document](#) is now available. Broken down by categories of general information, Deaf-Blind, Deafness and Blindness specific resources, the updated list contains hundreds of links and articles for education, technology, workplace, family/care giving and other types of useful public information. Note that this is an accessible document that may take 30-60 seconds to download.

OOD Expands Services to Older Blind

The Independent Living Older Blind (ILOB) program had a great year, closing September 30 with 1,589 Ohioans with vision loss age 55 and older reaching their goals. This is a 26% increase from the past fiscal year. Our ILOB team provided these seniors with tips, technology and skills to feel safer and more self-sufficient. The unit totaled 29 outreach activities statewide this year, reaching an estimated 1,179 potential participants.

Assistance varies in this program from special lighting or magnification technology for ease of reading, to tactile or high-contrast markings for kitchen safety, to talking devices such as large-number phones and talking clocks for communications needs. Average time from application to finish has decreased from 7.6 months to 6.5 months. It is great to have a fully-staffed, active team around Ohio with the training and compassion to serve our elders desiring to continue full and independent lives, including 740 Ohioans age 80 or older.

Please see <http://ood.ohio.gov/Programs-br-Partnerships/Programs/Independent-Living/Independent-Living-Services-for-ILOB> for eligibility and service details about this important program.

The OOD and OHBLN Partnership: What's New?

2017 witnessed a busy and exciting time for the partnership between OOD and the Ohio Business Leadership Network (OHBLN). OHBLN is composed of volunteers from the Ohio business community, providing Ohio employers with relevant information and resources to enhance their diversity initiatives and increase their bottom lines through the successful recruitment, selection, training and retention of a workforce, including qualified individuals with disabilities. Since 2011, OHBLN membership has increased significantly, from 11

members to 157 employer members. More than 30% of employers that participated in OOD's four job fairs last fall were OHBLN members.

In April of 2017, OOD and the OHBLN were awarded another three-year grant from the Poses Family Foundation for the Workplace Initiative of Ohio. This initiative bolsters efforts to link OOD job seekers with OHBLN member job opportunities. The initial grant agreement resulted in more than 840 OOD job seeker hires, primarily with OHBLN member employers. Within the first eight months of the new grant cycle, OOD has already exceeded the first-year goal of 575 hires.

Congratulations to Chris Moranda, who assumed her new role as the OHBLN Administrator in August. She is responsible for OHBLN oversight and operations, outreach to employers to assist in the promotion of OOD services, and recruitment of new OHBLN members. She is also facilitating the development and implementation of sustainability strategies, and is actively working with OHBLN members to identify employment opportunities for Ohioans with disabilities. Looking to the future, OOD will participate in the OHBLN's annual board meeting in February 13, as part of the strategic planning session.

Rehabilitation Services Administration Monitoring Visit

In September, four staff from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) came from Washington, D.C., for a routine monitoring visit of Ohio's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. RSA is the federal agency that administers the VR program. Areas of focus included program performance, transition services, supported employment services, and allocation and expenditure of funds and alignment with the workforce system. RSA reviewed program performance data; relevant policies and procedures; and participant case files as a part of monitoring protocols. RSA staff also met with OOD counselors and state agency partners while on site.

On October 30, RSA held an exit conference to provide preliminary feedback to OOD. RSA staff are in the process of drafting their monitoring report. Based upon discussion at the exit conference, some areas of continued focus for OOD will likely include:

1. New requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to develop the Individualized Plan for Employment within 90 days,
2. New performance measures under WIOA related to median earnings and credential attainment for program participants, and
3. New requirements under WIOA to make Pre-Employment Transition Services available to students with disabilities who have not yet applied for VR services (i.e., potentially eligible students).

Fee Schedule Updates and Resources

The new VR fee schedule went into effect October 1, 2017. This includes implementation of revised, streamlined reporting templates that were jointly developed by OOD and

representatives of the provider community. Updates to the [provider manual](#) have been made based on feedback both from OOD staff and providers.

In addition to the training associated with implementing the VR fee schedule, OOD staff also conducted training for job developers and other providers on October 30. This training focused on expectations of job developers, performance-based services and resume writing. These trainings were recorded and are now available for viewing at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCV3i2M6G6mfQhJX5aEfr4Mw?view_as=subscriber.

Moving forward in 2018, there will be follow up meetings with providers to discuss how the updated fee schedule is going. OOD can also take these opportunities to provide feedback and technical assistance, as needed. These sessions are slated for February or March. Stay tuned for upcoming announcements.

Access to Previous Issues of HireGround

Do you ever recall something from an earlier HireGround that you would like to access again? OOD has posted past issues starting with January 2014 in the [Communications tab on OOD's Website](#).