

## **2008 Innovations Awards Program APPLICATION**

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 08-M-27OH

**Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:**

State: **Ohio**

- Assign Program Category (applicant): **Corrections** (Use list at end of application)

1. Program Name:

***Improving the Employment Outcomes of Offenders with Disabilities Pilot Program***

2. Administering Agencies:

**Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC)**

**Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (RSC)**

3. Contact Person (Name and Title):

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4. Agency Addresses:

**The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction  
1050 Freeway Drive North, Columbus, Ohio 43229**

**The Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission  
400 East Campus View Blvd., Columbus, Ohio 43235 4604**

5. Telephone Number: **(614) 752-1150**

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7. E-Mail Address: [Terry.Collins@odrc.state.oh.us](mailto:Terry.Collins@odrc.state.oh.us)

8. Web site Addresses: DRC: [www.drc.state.oh.us](http://www.drc.state.oh.us) RSC: [www.rsc.ohio.gov](http://www.rsc.ohio.gov)

9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.

**A referral from DRC staff prompts a certified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VR Counselor) from RSC to conduct an eligibility screening on offenders while incarcerated. Once eligibility has been determined, the VR Counselor will complete a vocational assessment, and develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) that will optimally lead to a successful employment outcome.**

10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 1, 2008 to be considered.

**The first phase of the *Improving the Employment Outcomes of Offenders with Disabilities Pilot Program* began in January 2007.**

11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?

**The program was created to utilize RSC's expertise in placing people with disabilities into competitive employment. Prior to the implementation of this program, offenders with disabilities that might be eligible for services would have to wait until post-incarceration to apply with the local RSC office. Frequently, offenders do not have the necessary medical information readily available to document their disabilities, which could result in a delay in the delivery of services. Since most of the vital information (medical, mental health, educational, vocational) that could be utilized to determine eligibility, is housed within the correctional setting, DRC and RSC staff determined the most appropriate solution was to assign a VR Counselor to an institution to collect the vital information prior to release, once the appropriate information-sharing forms have been signed by the offender.**

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

<b>SERVICE TIMELINE</b>	
<b>12 months prior to release</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>During a Reentry Management Team Meeting, the offender is identified as a potential RSC consumer.</b></li><li>• <b>The VR Counselor reviews initial recommendations and provides questions, comments, and concerns to Reentry Management Team.</b></li><li>• <b>Reentry Management Team responds to VR Counselor's questions.</b></li></ul>
<b>9 months prior</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>VR Counselor meets with offender for first time to gauge his or her interest in applying for vocational rehabilitation services through RSC.</b></li><li>• <b>Preliminary vocational evaluation is conducted if appropriate.</b></li></ul>
<b>6 months prior</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>DRC completes the Placement Plan for an inmate, which will provide information needed to determine which VR Counselor will be working with the inmate upon they are released from incarceration.</b></li><li>• <b>VR Counselor assists the interested offender with the application for</b></li></ul>

	<p>services and determines his or her eligibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once eligibility is established, VR Counselor becomes a participating member of the offender's Reentry Management Team.</li> <li>• VR Counselor and the offender develop Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) that outlines job goals as well as the actions that need to be taken in order to achieve those goals.</li> </ul>
3 months prior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If appropriate, VR Counselor begins coordinating services for the offender with Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) that will offer the vocational rehabilitation services. Provision of some services may begin prior to release.</li> </ul>
Post Release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VR Counselor becomes a participating member of the Community Reentry Management Team.</li> <li>• VR Counselor purchases additional vocational rehabilitation services from CRPs, according to that individual's employment plan, to help the recently released offender obtain and maintain competitive employment.</li> <li>• VR Counselor and DRC Parole Officer regularly review progress and status of the recently-released offender (when applicable).</li> </ul>

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

*The Improving the Employment Outcomes of Offenders with Disabilities Pilot Program, not only provides on-site screening and assessment, but will initiate vocational services by Community Rehabilitation Providers while the offender is incarcerated.*

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

Expenses	Costs
Salary & Benefits for 3 RSC Staff Members	\$195,000
Laptop, Phone, and Office Equipment	\$10,000
Training and Travel	\$10,000
*Indirect Costs	\$ 38,415
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>\$253,415</b>

*\* Based on a 19.7% indirect cost rate, which was negotiated with the US Department of Education for FY2006 & FY2007? This rate includes the project's share of the following indirect costs:*

Statewide Costs	Information Technology
Asset Depreciation	Administrative Support Manager
Executive Director's Office	Property Management/Office Support
Legislative Affairs Office	Interpreter Services
Support Services/IT Team Leader	Consumer Affairs Team Leader
Finance & Fiscal Services	Public Affairs Office
Budget	Affirmative Action Office
Legal Counsel's Office	Human Resources Office

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

**During the first eighteen months of the program, DRC has provided \$200,000 of GRF dollars spanning over the 2007 and 2008 fiscal years.**

16. How is the program funded?

**One of the greatest opportunities afforded by this collaboration is that the federal government (United States Department of Education, Division of Rehabilitation Services Administration) will match state General Revenue Funds on a 78.8% to 21.2% ratio. In other words, for every dollar spent by the project partners, \$3.72 is obtained from the federal government, and will be used to provide vocational rehabilitation services for offenders being released from a correctional institution. DRC provided the initial \$200,000 of GRF dollars, thus allowing RSC to receive approximately \$744,000 in federal match dollars to provide services to the consumers (offenders).**

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

**The program was initiated with an agreement between the two state agencies whose directors signed a *Memorandum of Understanding* that outlined the responsibilities of the staff from each agency.**

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

**The staff from both agencies utilizes computers and existing department software that tracks their own consumer/offender information.**

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

**No, there are *similar* programs.**

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

**While the specifics of the *Improving the Employment Outcomes of Offenders with Disabilities Pilot Program* are different, (the Ohio program offers services to all eligible offenders regardless the length of sentence, and where possible vocational rehabilitation services are initiated while incarcerated), a search has revealed a similar process with the Short Term Offender Program (STOP) at Broad River Correctional Institution in Columbia, South Carolina. The South Carolina Department of Correction has formed a partnership with the South Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Services Commission to provide vocational services to eligible offenders to better prepare them for reentry into the workplace. Through training, counseling and programs Vocational Rehabilitation Services assists and empowers eligible offenders to achieve and maintain meaningful employment.**

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

**Yes, the pilot phase of the program is fully implemented in fourteen of the thirty-two institutions, three of the seven parole regions, and two of the six RSC regions. Once the initial evaluation is completed, the program will be implemented in the remaining locations.**

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

- **PRO- The program addresses issues with a particularly problematic population that is otherwise very hard to service - due to the nature of their disabilities. The interagency collaboration and involvement of RSC staff from "inside-out" provides more of a seamless transition relative to the offender's reentry to the community.**
- **PRO- Sharing vital information regarding the consumer's medical/mental status has vastly improved the time between initial screening and eligibility determination and service provision.**
- **PRO- Research conducted by the Urban Institute, the U.S. Department of Justice, and National Institute of Corrections, has indicated that offenders who are employed are less likely to return to prison.**
- **PRO- It has been shown that long-term unemployment contributes to depression, feelings of worthlessness, self-pity, self-absorption, higher risk of substance abuse, greater chance of isolation, and poverty. Ultimately, unemployment can be more harmful to the health of people with disabilities than the stresses of employment.**
- **PRO- Skills learned and developed during employment (managing stress and uncertainty, communicating with others, delegating physical and psychological symptoms to a place of less influence and importance) can be used as coping mechanisms during times of unemployment. It is a normal part of a working life to be unemployed at different times.**
- **PRO- As employment of people with disabilities increases, the barriers of stigma, class bias, and discrimination will also diminish. Many service providers assist consumers and their families to understand what community employment is, and assist people with disabilities in finding work that will positively impact that individual's life.**
- **PRO- The workplace is a way to meet people and expand social networks. Work acts as a training opportunity for the enhancement and development of social skills, and provides its own safety net for people with disabilities. The support needed and provided by co-workers can elevate an individual's life experience from one of isolation to one of relatedness.**
- **CON- In approximately 66% of cases, the consumer fails to attend one or more of the provider services appointments that was established. Currently, the implementation team is exploring ways to improve the post-release follow-up of the consumer. One strategy under consideration is for the DRC staff to identify the offender timely, thus permitting the VR Counselors an opportunity to engage the consumer at an earlier point in the release process.**

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

- **The program was rolled-out during a three-phase process over an eighteen month period. The implementation team is recommending extending the roll-out period an additional twelve months.**
- **Initially, the implementation team had planned to utilize three full-time VR Counselor's for the program. During the second phase, the team decided that in order to provide optimal coverage of the sites (institutions and parole offices) one of the FTE positions would be converted to two part-time, thus providing four staff.**
- **The program has opened the door for additional collaborations between the partners. (e.g. joint participation in job/resource fairs, community-group affiliations, and additional cross-training opportunities)**

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

- **Overcoming of the negative perceptions or personal biases of working with the offender population**
- **General Revenue Funding sources or non-Federal dollar requirement to access the Federal match funds**
- **Identifying Community Rehabilitation Providers that are willing to deliver services during incarceration**
- **Departmental policies may need to be modified to meet vital information sharing requirements**
- **Having VR Counselors properly trained and motivated to work within the prison environment**