

**National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Virtual Learning Courses (VLC)
Session 3 of 4: Team Building, Staff Retention, and Partnership Development
October 17, 2023, 2 p.m. ET**

NVTAC Staff

Sarah Chung, NVTAC Coach

Chris Taylor, NVTAC Coach

Key Points

- **Introduction**

- NVTAC reminded attendees that HVRP best practices would be shared during this session. NVTAC encouraged all grantees to utilize best practices that may improve their service delivery. Before implementing a practice discussed during this session, grantees must review their award statement of work and contact their Grant Officer's Technical Representative (GOTR) to discuss if it is an allowable cost or activity or if it requires an amendment to their approved plan.
- **NVTAC Overview:** NVTAC provides individualized technical assistance (TA), training, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and additional support to HVRP grantees. To contact NVTAC or request TA, reach out to contact@nvtac.org.

- **HVRP Team Building**

- Mission-Driven Focus
 - HVRP staff should all be on the same page regarding the mission of HVRP. HVRP is designed to provide services to assist in reintegrating veterans experiencing homelessness into meaningful employment within the labor force and stimulate the development of effective service delivery systems that will address the complex problems facing homeless veterans. Grant recipients are also working to remove barriers to the full and equal participation of marginalized communities through partnerships with various organizations that deliver equitable services to marginalized veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
 - It is important that HVRP staff feel empowered to create a secondary mission that is meaningful and impactful to each veteran and focuses on helping them reintegrate and reach their employment goals. It takes a team of people to help a veteran be successful in HVRP. Working together to achieve a goal helps the HVRP staff develop a culture of cooperation through a sense of combined purpose.
- [HVRP Training and Education](#)
 - It is essential that we continue to train and develop all HVRP staff so they have the tools and resources they need to be successful. Maintain all HVRP staff materials and resources in one central location that is easily accessible.

- Managers can ask HVRP staff what they need to feel successful. This input can help HVRP staff feel valued and like their input really matters. Include HVRP staff in HVRP decision-making processes, especially with training and education. These experiences gained are a win-win for the staff members and the organization as a whole.
 - Incorporate NVTAC in HVRP staff training. NVTAC can help get new and current staff members on the same page around many HVRP topics. Below are some examples of topics NVTAC can assist with:
 - [HVRP 101](#)
 - [Case management](#)
 - [Motivational interviewing](#)
 - [Special populations](#)
 - [Eligibility](#)
 - [Effective partnership development](#)
 - Team Building Tips
 - To retain your HVRP staff, remind them that they are valued members of the team and their performance matters to the overall program. Giving opportunities for staff to share innovative strategies and getting everyone involved will foster a strong HVRP team.
 - There are many tools and resources to promote team building, which can improve the morale and efficiency of the team.
 - **HVRP Staff Retention**
 - Why does turnover occur?
 - When HVRP staff feel valued and important, they will be more likely to invest their time and effort in the program. If staff cannot comfortably bring forth their ideas, they will not have the buy-in, which can increase turnover. HVRP staff will work harder to help reach the goals of HVRP if the work culture is built on respect, transparency, and mutual value.
 - Operating the program in a way that lacks transparency can lead to distrust and increased turnover.
 - Avoiding Turnover
 - Look for signs of staff burnout. Increase the amount of rest time your staff has and empower a good work/life balance. The goal is to have staff that come to work feeling refreshed and ready to take on the world.
 - [NVTAC Community of Practice \(CoP\) Self-Care for Providers](#) is a great tool to identify and address staff burnout.
 - Be clear and intentional in the job description and try to avoid gray areas. Listing objectives such as “other duties as assigned” is ambiguous and does not provide a clear picture of what applicants can expect in their role.
 - Keep staff compensation and benefits at a [living wage](#) for the region.
 - Having grace and practicing generosity and gratitude. The staff’s work and contributions should be celebrated.

- Cultivating a Constructive Team Environment
 - There is value in having a diverse workforce that makes everyone feel comfortable and included. This can help establish trust among HVRP staff.
 - A culture of healthy and transparent communication can increase staff retention.
 - If there are training opportunities that can help your staff grow as a professional, share them in a centralized location. This will show you have their best interest at heart.
- **Partnership Development**
 - Partners for HVRP
 - It is crucial to consider partners that could be most effective with wrap-around services for HVRP. What providers can you partner with that can offer what HVRP cannot?
 - Partner agencies may have helpful information on how to find veterans or resources, even if they do not provide the service themselves. Examples of potential partners:
 - Housing and homelessness providers
 - Local, state, and federal workforce agencies
 - Veteran service agencies
 - Jails and prisons
 - Mental health clinics and services
 - Domestic violence services
 - Community colleges
 - Employers
 - Community-based organizations (CBO) providing employment services
 - U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Community Employment Coordinators (CEC)
 - Building Rapport
 - When building rapport with providers, practicing active listening may help them feel more comfortable sharing. First, share what you can offer and help the other provider understand the benefits of partnering with HVRP.
 - Leading with empathy and respect can help to strengthen the partnership with the provider.
 - You have the opportunity to educate other providers about HVRP and why they should partner with you.
 - Sustaining Partnerships
 - It is important to identify the resources that both HVRP and the other provider need and create a process that can help sustain the partnership and help with wrap-around services or referrals.

- Grant recipients can consider inviting partner agencies to their on-site location to provide resources that veterans need accessibly.
 - Encourage HVRP staff to create a list of what HVRP cannot provide that veterans need or request.
 - If meetings or case conferencing are necessary and a standing meeting has not been established, set up an initial meeting. Be a clear and transparent communicator and follow up on planning efforts.
 - Leveraging Partnerships
 - Leveraging partnerships and utilizing the bandwidth of partner agencies can decrease staff burnout. Make sure that partnerships are reciprocal, and one partner is not benefitting more than the other.
 - Find ways to promote each other's programs. For example, offer to grab a stack of the other provider's outreach cards and ask them to hand out your HVRP cards.
- **Discussion Questions**
 - **Question:** What challenges have you experienced with team building and staff retention? What tips do you have to overcome these challenges?
 - **Response (challenge):** The entire agency is short-staffed, including finance and human resources (HR), and that affects all aspects of our team, from new hires to reimbursements to proper communication.
 - **Response (challenge):** Staff being recruited away from other agencies because there is better pay and benefits.
 - **Response (tip):** We host out-of-the-office team activities and birthday celebrations once per month.
 - **Response (tip):** We did a wage analysis, which helped a lot to retain staff.
 - **Response (tip):** If we can work to improve the workplace culture, mission focus, and buy-in from staff, loyalty can also deter people from leaving.
 - **Question:** What challenges have you experienced with developing partnerships? What tips do you have to overcome these challenges?
 - **Response (challenge):** Other agencies are also having staffing issues as well, so it's hard to sustain a partnership when people are leaving on both sides.
 - **Response (tip):** I prefer face-to-face meetings with partners. It is good to show what HVRP can offer rather than what we can receive.
 - **Response (tip):** Visit other agencies to share information and learn about each other's programs.
 - **Response (tip):** The initial introduction is very important, but the follow-up is more important to sustain a strong relationship with a partner.
 - **Response (tip):** Leverage resources with partner agencies that HVRP does not provide.
- **Resources**
 - [NVTAC CoP Self-Care for Providers](#)

- [NVTAC Menu of Services](#)
- Email: contact@nvtac.org
- Website: nvtac.org

Conclusion

Keeping HVRP staff happy and feeling valued and appreciated is paramount to the overall success of HVRP. There are skills and strategies that HVRP grant recipients can learn and improve upon to promote HVRP staff team building, staff retention, and partnership development. For example, grantees can promote a workplace culture of healthy and transparent communication, which can increase staff retention. The fourth and final VLC of the current series will cover an overview of requirements and skills for veteran training, job placements, and retention.

HVRP grantees can request individualized TA for their program at any time by emailing contact@nvtac.org.

For more information, please visit www.nvtac.org.

You can review the presentation through the following link: [NVTAC VLC October 2023: Team Building, Staff Retention, and Partnership Development](#).