DePalma (2000) defined evidence-based practice (EBP) as “a total process beginning with knowing what clinical questions to ask, how to find the best practice, and how to critically appraise the evidence for validity and applicability to the particular care situation.” To enable vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors to implement EBP into VR service delivery and ultimately improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities, a mixed-method study was conducted to gain an understanding of VR counselors’ incentives, barriers, and training needs related to acquiring, applying, and sharing information related to EBP. This information was used to translate and disseminate evidence-based knowledge in the multi-modal, multi-directional format identified by VR counselors as being preferred and potentially most effective in teaching how to integrate EBP into VR service delivery.

In this session we will introduce the purpose and activities of the RRTC–EBP VR, discuss the various phases of research conducted, describe the spectrum of practice from emerging to evidence-based, and explore the vital process of knowledge mobilization used to provide VR practitioners with information and tools for implementing evidence-based VR practices.
The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover emerging and promising vocational rehabilitation service delivery practices that helped improve employment outcomes of people with disabilities. The multi-stage analysis involved the selection of four high performing state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies based on annual adjusted rehabilitation rates and other indicators of innovations in practice. The primary research questions were designed to elicit information from the case study participants regarding services and interventions they believed were evidence-based, innovative, or promising practices that led to improving employment outcomes for customers served. In addition, information was sought to enable a comprehensive analysis on the policies, procedures, practices and structural elements related to the provision of effective best practices to individuals with disabilities served in the four-state sample of VR agencies that led to successful employment outcomes.

The research questions were intentionally developed as open-ended in order to provide an opportunity for sharing evidence-based and best practices and to encourage candid dialogue among the study participants. The main case study research questions were:

1. What are the specific best practices that appear to be evidence-based and transportable to other state VR agencies?
2. What are the best models of effective practice, policy and procedures among state VR agencies that result in the creation of an environment that promotes innovation and the effective delivery of services to assist individuals with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes?

In this session we will review the methodology used in this four-state case study and highlight our principle findings for the two main research questions addressed. Finally, we will present our conclusions and recommendations for further research and development in this important area.
RRTC–EBP VR
Rehabilitation Research & Training Center
For Evidence Based Practice in Vocational Rehabilitation

Personal and Environmental Factors that Support and Encourage Innovation and Best Practices that Lead to Employment Outcomes in Public Rehabilitation

Moderator:
Fong Chan (UW-Madison) and Tim Tansey (UW-Madison)

The World Health Organization’s International Classification of Functioning (ICF) model has gained wide acceptance among international rehabilitation researchers and professionals as a framework that can be used to support a systematic approach for understanding the effect of chronic illness and disability on inclusion and community participation of persons with disabilities. The ICF is structured around three broad components: body functions and structure; activities (related to tasks and actions by an individual) and participation (involvement in a life situation); and individual level characteristics and environmental factors. The emphasis of the ICF is on function rather than condition or disease.

This quantitative study involved service recipients from five state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies and was conducted to validate ICF as a VR service model. Specifically, the researchers were interested in the utility of the ICF model to enhance the effectiveness of VR counselors in their service delivery. As part of this validation study, the researchers designed and tested a brief screening instrument to assess VR customers’ functioning, activity levels, personal strengths, and environment supports. By developing a theory-driven, evidence-based measure, the researchers sought to support rehabilitation counselors in their efforts to assess, plan, and provide services to promote employment success and full integration of persons with disabilities into society. The research was focused on understanding the relationship between the severity of disability and employment outcomes. The researchers were also interested in identifying the link between health, daily activities, the working alliance, and client engagement in the VR process impacted by employment outcomes. Finally, the research attempted to explain the connection and interaction between the severity of disability, the work environment, and individual characteristics.

In this session we will review the research, approach, and findings from the ICF research project. We will discuss the relationship of findings to current practice and how to incorporate the ICF assessment into case conceptualization, case planning, and service provision. Finally, we will examine the benefits of implementing a theory-driven, evidence-based measure on creating a foundation for best practices and innovation in the state VR program.