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# Building the Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Self-Employment Toolkit

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## PROGRESS REPORT

# BUILDING THE TRIBAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SELF-EMPLOYMENT TOOLKIT

April 2022

The Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Self-Employment Toolkit helps people with disabilities explore and prepare for self-employment.

## IT STARTED WITH A PHONE CALL

In 2017, I received a phone call from Rebecca Holland, who was serving as the Program Manager at the Pueblo of Jemez, Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (TVR) program. Rebecca was trying to track down some self-employment resources from RTC:Rural that she had used in the past. The resources were developed by Dr. Nancy Arnold, who devoted much of her career to supporting self-employment opportunities for people with disabilities served through the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) system. Although Nancy had since retired, Rebecca's request came at a fortunate time -- we were in the process of updating our self-employment materials for VR and creating an online platform for accessing them.

The Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities (RTC:Rural) is funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) and has been housed at the University of Montana since 1987. RTC:Rural collaborates with disability community members across the country to shape our research agenda and ensure that our evidence-based solutions fit rural contexts.



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The initial conversation led to a deeper discussion about adapting self-employment materials specifically for Native American and Alaska Native Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (TVR) programs. The topic of self-employment had been identified at a recent Consortia of Administrators of Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR) meeting as an area of importance for counselor training and support. A partnership was beginning to take shape to address this need.

## CANAR

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CANAR provides a forum for TVR programs to share ideas, collaborate, and communicate with one another about common issues and concerns. CANAR is led by a Board that is nominated by CANAR members.

Rebecca invited me to share our ideas at one of CANAR's Board meetings. Based on positive feedback, we developed a project which relied on a strong partnership with Tribal advisors to translate the VR self-employment guide for cultural fit and appropriateness.

In 2018, we were able to share existing self-employment materials and translation ideas at a CANAR conference at the Mystic Lake Casino Hotel in Minnesota. CANAR attendees provided ideas for translating materials, and several agreed to participate as advisors.



## TRIBAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (TVR) ADVISORS

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As part of an RTC:Rural project, we developed a participatory process for translating the existing VR Self-employment Guide that involved advisor direction and feedback. Our identified TVR advisors from CANAR received a stipend and travel support to participate in monthly teleconference calls and semi-annual in-person meetings to lead extensive chapter revisions for cultural and TVR agency fit. Our eight TVR advisors included:

- Tom Draghi, State of Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (Wisconsin)
- Kari Fragua, Jemez VR Program (New Mexico)
- Irma Goodwine, Association of Village Council Presidents (Alaska)
- Rebecca Holland, Jemez VR Program (New Mexico) and Montana Vocational Rehabilitation
- Jolleen Laverdure, Oto Kahe Teca VR (South Dakota)
- Sara Lizak, Kawerak, Inc. (Alaska)
- Amelia Rivers, Central Louisiana Intertribal VR Program (Louisiana)
- Paula Seanez, Navajo Nation Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (Arizona)

We held our in-person TVR advisory meetings in conjunction with CANAR conferences, where we presented on the project. This allowed us to gain broader stakeholder input to shape the self-employment materials for TVR.

## TRANSLATION EXAMPLES

The iterative translation process resulted in both small and substantial changes to our existing self-employment materials and resulted in the creation of the TVR Self-Employment Toolkit (<http://www.tvrselfemployment.org>). Examples of advisor and stakeholder input include:

- Some business terms, such as competition, did not align with their community values and needed reframing.
- Information and tools needed to include circumstances of starting a business on reservation lands, such as Tribal Council approvals, permissions to use cultural symbols, land-use considerations, and taxes.
- Materials needed to be interactive and supported with more examples and worksheets.
- The look and feel of the website needed to reflect Native American and Alaska Native people, businesses, and communities.
- The website needed to function in areas with slower internet speeds, and all materials needed to be available in printable and downloadable formats for sharing.
- The website needed to include information about supporting self-employment through subsistence activities, a common self-employment preference for TVR consumers in rural Alaska.
- The website needed to be framed as a toolkit of resources that people could pick and choose from rather than a guide, since stakeholders come from multiple tribes, traditions, and agencies that have their own ways of supporting consumers with disabilities.

The contributions from TVR advisors and stakeholders were so valuable that many of the suggested changes were also incorporated into the self-employment materials for the State VR programs.



### TRIBAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SELF-EMPLOYMENT TOOLKIT

Click on the chapter pictures to get started.

1 | OVERVIEW



2 | READINESS



3 | BUSINESS FEASIBILITY



4 | THE BUSINESS PLAN



## TOOLKIT CHAPTERS

The TVR Self-Employment Toolkit includes 8 chapters focused on different aspects of the self-employment exploration and business planning process. Table 1 describes these chapters.

**Table 1: TVR Self-Employment Toolkit Chapters**

**Chapter 1: Introducing Self-Employment** provides an overview of the different toolkit chapters and goes over some basic information about self-employment. It describes different phases that may occur within Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation, including counselor and consumer roles in exploring and pursuing self-employment.

**Chapter 2: Self-Employment Readiness** explores reasons for becoming self-employed. Counselors and consumers can review some common false or inaccurate beliefs about self-employment. Then, consumers can work through some self-assessment worksheets focused on values, traits, and skills related to the business idea. The chapter helps both the counselor and consumer assess whether self-employment is a good fit.

**Chapter 3: Business Feasibility** focuses on the business idea and how to figure out if the business has a good chance of success. The chapter opens with a worksheet for figuring out how much sales are needed to cover basic living and business costs. If the business still seems like a good idea, the remaining sections include three planning worksheets (About You, About Your Business, and Start-Up Costs worksheets) that can be used as a basis for developing a full business plan.

**Chapter 4: Introducing the Business Plan** describes parts of a typical business plan and highlights the value of business planning. It covers the first two sections of the business plan including the executive summary and the business description.

**Chapter 5: Marketing Plan** focuses on business sales. It helps the consumer develop strategies for showcasing the unique qualities of the business and the different ways to identify and reach customers. It includes strategies and examples of how to do customer research.

**Chapter 6: Operations Plan** covers legal requirements for getting a business started, and how the business will be managed and operated. It includes considerations for operating a business on reservation lands.

**Chapter 7: Financial Plan** helps you make sure you have enough money to run your business, and that you have thought about how you will cover your costs. The chapter includes multiple worksheets and examples to simplify the financial planning process.

**Chapter 8: Self-employment through Subsistence Activities** provides guidance for consumers interested in subsistence activities. Self-employment through subsistence activities focuses on traditional ways of life (for example, hunting to meet basic needs and to barter, share, and trade). This differs from self-employment through a small business, which is focused on sales for cash income.

## SHARING THE TOOLKIT

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The TVR Self-employment Toolkit is completed, and we are planning to share it with TVR programs across the country. Originally, we planned to begin this process in conjunction with a CANAR conference. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted these plans, and we are shifting strategies.

This factsheet is the first step in getting the word out! We have also had discussions with Northwest Tribal College about offering a mini-credential focused on self-employment for TVR counselors, and we are hoping to showcase the Toolkit at an upcoming CANAR leadership call.

Please contact Catherine Ipsen (Email: [Catherine.ipsen@mso.umt.edu](mailto:Catherine.ipsen@mso.umt.edu), Phone: 406-243-4562) if you would like to learn more about the TVR Self-Employment Toolkit website or would like to receive personalized training for staff at your TVR agency.

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