

American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center

Smoke Signals

Issue 3: Overview of AIVRTTAC Services

Summer 2022



“A National Technical Assistance Center serving all AIVRS projects through education, training, and technical assistance to ensure the provision of culturally appropriate vocational rehabilitation services.”

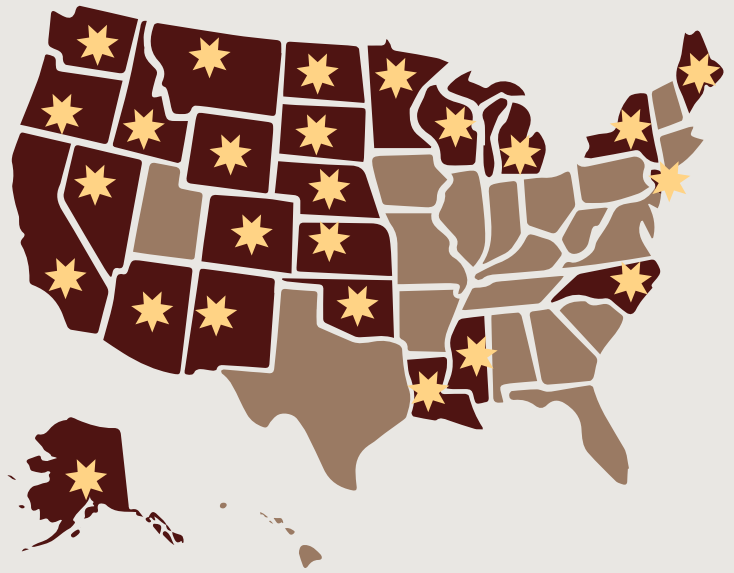
Introduction

The purpose of the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Training and Technical Assistance Center (AIVRTTAC) is to provide training and technical assistance, continuing education, coaching, and guidance to the 93 American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS) projects across the nation. Our goal is to improve the ability of project staff to provide culturally appropriate, high-quality vocational rehabilitation services that help American Indians and Alaska Natives with disabilities obtain gainful employment.

The Unique Needs of AIVRS Projects

State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies historically faced several challenges to serving Native American communities, due to linguistic and cultural barriers as well as the remoteness of many tribal reservations. The federal AIVRS program was established in 1978 to fund local tribal projects that would provide accessible and culturally appropriate VR services to Native American communities. These AIVRS projects generally hire from within the tribe, allowing staff to connect more readily on a personal and cultural level with service participants.

In addition, AIVRS projects are located on reservations and address VR topics unique to tribal communities, such as traditional healing services and subsistence activities (for instance, hunting and fishing) as forms of employment.



AIVRTTAC currently serves 93 AIVRS projects in 26 states.



AIVRTTAC Director Wayne Dagele addresses participants at the 2022 AIVRS Academy held in Phoenix, Arizona.

Given their unique approach to providing services, AIVRS projects have distinct needs that set them apart from state vocational rehabilitation agencies. In particular, many staff members may not have a professional background in vocational rehabilitation counseling, and might benefit from training in topics such as case management, policies and procedures, employment development, and other subjects relevant to providing VR services. Additionally, AIVRS staff face a number of barriers to helping participants find jobs, such as the remoteness of many reservations, limited local job opportunities, and limited access to health care and educational resources. Therefore, there is also a need for guidance and support in overcoming these barriers to ensure that AIVRS staff are able to secure the best possible outcomes for the individuals they serve.

How AIVRTTAC Supports AIVRS Projects

In 2015, two separate projects were funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), a federal agency under the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, to provide training and materials addressing the unique needs of AIVRS projects. The Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Institute at Northwest Indian College (NWIC-TVRI Institute) was tasked with developing college courses on tribal VR topics to increase the knowledge and skills of AIVRS project staff. AIVRTTAC, housed at Northern Arizona University's Institute for Human Development, was responsible for developing products, webinars, and other technical assistance resources for AIVRS projects.

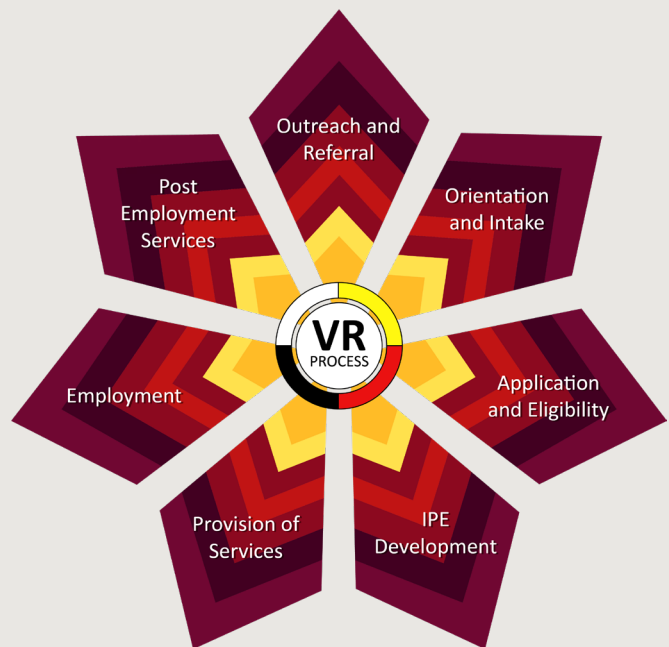
In 2021, with new funding from RSA, these two projects combined. This renewed funding and partnership allow us to continue providing existing services while expanding into promising new areas of training, technical assistance, and continuing education. The following are just a few of the services and resources that AIVRTTAC can provide to AIVRS projects:

Intensive Training and Technical Assistance (ITTA):

AIVRTTAC staff can work directly with AIVRS projects, conducting on-site technical assistance focused on specific staff needs. ITTA can be provided on nearly any topic that is determined in collaboration with the AIVRS project. Examples include: case file management, policies and procedures, project/grant management, case management practices, and coaching and guidance on VR practices and services. To request ITTA, visit https://nau.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6S5ACcIcDS9t89w.

Webinars: AIVRTTAC staff and content experts hold regular webinars on topics identified by RSA, as well as other topics of interest to AIVRS projects. These include policies and procedures; employment development and placement; mental health; the vocational rehabilitation process; and culturally appropriate VR practices. See the [AIVRTTAC home page \(https://aivrttac.org/\)](https://aivrttac.org/) for a calendar of upcoming events, and visit <https://aivrttac.org/webinars/> to access previous webinars.

Continuing Education: Since 2015, the NWIC-TVRI Institute has developed 13 courses covering foundational tribal VR knowledge and skills. They will continue offering credit and non-credit bearing courses on TVRI services, increasing the knowledge and skills of AIVRS staff across the country. The TVRI Institute is also creating several bachelor's degree options appropriate for AIVRS staff. For additional information on courses, programs, and enrollment, visit <https://www.nwic.edu/educational-pathways/tvr-institute/>.



AIVRTTAC's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Process Toolkit is organized around a wheel depicting the seven steps of the VR process, which was inspired by the traditional Native American star quilt design.

Products Available Online:

The AIVRS Project Directors Toolkit contains helpful information and resources for new AIVRS directors, focusing on work that needs to be completed during a new project director's first 90 days on the job.

The TVR Handbook, created by the NWIC-TVRI Institute, is a comprehensive training resource for AIVRS project staff and others who serve American Indians and Alaska Natives with disabilities.

The Financial Management Toolkit, also developed by the NWIC-TVRI Institute, provides new tribal VR directors with information and resources related to grant and budget setup and management.

The Employment Development and Placement Handbook was developed to improve AIVRS staff knowledge of employment development and placement techniques, leading to an increased number of successful employment outcomes for project participants.

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Process toolkit provides information on each step of the VR process and directs users to tools that can be used in the field.

The Case File Example provides AIVRS project staff with an example of all components of an active case, from application to post-employment services. Included in this example are templates that AIVRS project staff may edit for their own use.

See the **AIVRTTAC “Products and Tools” page** (<https://aivrttac.org/products-and-tools/>) for additional resources designed to help AIVRS projects provide high-quality culturally responsive VR services to their tribal participants. You can also access the **AIVRTTAC Facebook page** at <https://www.facebook.com/AIVRTTAC/> for information about upcoming events.

Since 2015, AIVRTTAC and TVRI Institute staff have worked to ensure that indigenous practices, principles, and concepts are respected throughout all their activities. This commitment to providing services tailored to the unique cultural and historical dynamics involved in tribal VR has continued into its second funding period, fulfilling a vital need for culturally appropriate VR services in the American Indian community.

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