



Director's Corner

Employment. Unemployment. Two words with completely different meanings but directly connected to pride, self-worth, and quality of life. As you all know, the unemployment rate among American Indians living on reservations is vastly higher than elsewhere. In order to increase employment rates, we first must look at unemployment and its causes. In my deep dive down the rabbit hole on this topic, this is what I found...

Cyclical unemployment is the number of people out of work due to a temporary setback in the economy, such as a recession or change in the business cycle. On the other hand, *structural unemployment* is more long-term, the result of many years of socioeconomic changes that marginalize a group of workers, such as technological advances, employers' need for new skill sets, and jobs moving off reservation. Thus, while cyclical unemployment may be reduced through fiscal and monetary stimulus, structural unemployment needs more long-term solutions.

Other types of unemployment include:

- Frictional unemployment, which occurs when people voluntarily leave their jobs. As opposed to structural changes to the economy or the natural cycle of markets, frictional unemployment arises because people prioritize other aspects of life, decide to return to school, or decide they need a break from working.
- Institutional unemployment, which is related to actions by the government. For example, consider leadership changes within the tribe, which often lead to changes in administrative staff roles. This extracts available jobs from the market.
- Seasonal unemployment, which is caused by changes in the available job market due to seasonal fluctuations. For example, certain positions may only be available during the winter, such as operating a ski resort. These types of jobs are usually tourist or weather related and often have a predetermined end date (and a presumed start date in the following year).

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Institute for Human Development

The Institute for Human Development is a research and training program located at Northern Arizona University. Our program is part of a national network of University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs). In Arizona, we are designated as one of two Arizona University Centers on Disabilities.

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- Long-term unemployment, which the Bureau of Labor Statistics describes as unemployment lasting 27 weeks or more in which the individual has been actively seeking employment for the past four weeks. For many of our potential participants, this is simply seen as a fact of life on the reservation. As this type of unemployment leads to the deterioration of skill sets and financial hardship, it typically has the most negative effect on the economy.

From the perspective of tribal vocational rehabilitation (TVR), all of these types of unemployment affect people living on reservations. It is important to understand what kind of unemployment our program participants are experiencing in order to tailor TVR services to meet their needs. Some kinds of unemployment, like institutional or seasonal unemployment, will naturally be difficult to address without considering alternative careers, while cyclical unemployment is caused by complex social forces and cannot be addressed by TVR services alone. One of the most effective ways that AIVRS projects can address structural and long-term unemployment is helping program participants acquire new skill sets in a culturally responsive way, through training or education programs. This increases the likelihood of successful employment outcomes and job retention.

A final reminder: AIVRTTAC + TVR Institute remains available to support your training and technical assistance needs. The TVR Institute continues to provide educational opportunities each quarter and now offers a bachelor's degree in human services with a focus on American Indian VR services. Our ITTA (intensive training and technical assistance), TTTA (targeted TTA), and UTTA (universal TTA) services are just an email or call away!

Please contact us if you have questions or need programmatic support. Our main point of contact is aivrvtac@nau.edu, but we also understand that if you know certain staff personally from their years of service, you may prefer to reach out to them directly. We are here to support and empower you in serving tribal members with disabilities.

Wayne Dagel MS, LCPC

Wayne Dagel, MS, LCPC

AIVRS Academy Held During Institute for Human Development Conference by Rebecca Holland, AIVRTTAC VR Coordinator

Tribal VR staff, both new and “seasoned” (a term we prefer to “old”), took part in the American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS) Academy breakout sessions held at the 2024 Institute for Human Development (IHD) Evidence for Success Disability Conference in Chandler, Arizona. Based on evaluations and comments provided by attendees, this training was a tremendous success. The average attendance was 33 individuals per session, which is an excellent turnout for an in-person training.

The AIVRS Academy was developed by AIVRTTAC over two years ago to provide in-depth VR process training to tribal VR (TVR) staff, especially new hires. The training concentrates on learning the VR process, beginning with outreach and ending with post-employment services. Two academies are held per year, one online and the other in person. The AIVRS Academy held at the IHD Conference in June was the second training this year, following the online training held in February.



**2024 Institute for Human Development (IHD)
Evidence for Success Disability Conference**

Dr. Lee Gaseoma (AIVRTTAC), Paula Seanez (Navajo Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services), Jamie Emanuel (AIVRTTAC), and Rebecca Holland (AIVRTTAC) facilitated the four breakout sessions. Each session focused on different parts of the TVR process.

Session one covered relationship building and cultural significance, session two outreach to application, session three assessment and eligibility, and session four IPE (individualized plan for employment) development and service provision.

Session evaluations indicated that over 95% of the attendees felt the sessions were exceptional and beneficial to their work. The attendees had many great things to say about the academy. One stated, “This was a very good session. I look forward to going on the AIVRTTAC website to see what I can utilize with my clients.” Another said, “I enjoyed working in a group with a case study. This helped to hear how others would go about the services to provide for the consumer.” Another attendee stated, “Very interactive and interesting! So thankful to learn this information.”

AIVRTTAC is preparing for the next two AIVRS Academies that will take place between October 1, 2024 and September 30, 2025. We are considering February 2025 for our online academy and will soon identify a location and date for the in-person academy. AIVRTTAC invites all TVR program staff to consider participating in one of our AIVRS Academies in the next fiscal year. Information about the next academy will be included in the AIVRTTAC Weekly Update. If you would like more information, please contact Rebecca Holland at rebecca.holland@nau.edu.

The SAGE Club – A Successful TVR Youth Readiness Initiative by Timothy Yeahquo (Cheyenne and Arapaho VR Program Director)

This past year, the Cheyenne and Arapaho American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Program (CAAIVR), in collaboration with the tribe’s 477 project, launched a groundbreaking youth work readiness initiative called DREAMS (Developing Responsible Employees Aptitude and Marketing Success). As part of this initiative, we developed the SAGE (Students Achieving Gainful Employment) Club, which is dedicated to creating a supportive environment for our tribal youth with disabilities and equipping them with essential job-related skills to prepare for and engage in the workforce.

The CAAIVR and DREAMS programs are committed to providing comprehensive training and supportive services for the SAGE Club. We established a partnership with a local high school’s Indian Education Office and began holding meetings at the school, specifically targeting tribal students with disabilities and other barriers to their success.



During our SAGE Club meetings, we offered training in resume writing, hard skills, soft skills, and interview techniques. In the spring, we expanded our efforts to include lessons in traditional entrepreneurship. This involved teaching students traditional crafts such as beading, hand drum making, and gourd making. The goal was to show them that these traditional crafts could become viable sources of income, empowering them to be self-sufficient if they chose to pursue this path.

At the end of the school year, we proudly hosted our first SAGE Club banquet, showcasing the students' efforts and traditional projects. The SAGE Club has proven to be a great success for the CAAIVR program, helping us connect with students who desperately need our services. As a result, we have seen tremendous growth in our transition cases.

The positive impact of the SAGE Club on our tribal youth is clear. By providing them with the necessary skills and supports, we are helping them overcome barriers and achieve gainful employment. The CAAIVR program is proud of the progress we have made and we look forward to continuing our efforts to empower our tribal youth.

Pacific and Southwest Regional Training - Tucson, Arizona, April 23-25, 2024

by Jamie Emanuel, AIVRTTAC VR Coordinator

The AIVRTTAC Pacific and Southwest Regional Training took place in April at the beautiful Casino Del Sol Resort, located on Pascua Yaqui tribal land in Tucson, Arizona. The resort was breathtaking, resembling an oasis in the desert, with indoor and outdoor pools, a gorgeous meeting and conference center, and many excellent restaurants.

The training began with breakfast provided by AIVRTTAC and then a welcome and prayer by AIVRTTAC's traditional cultural guidance and support lead, Dr. Lee Gaseoma. Our first activity was a group team-building session, which included an activity to identify our personality types and how they affect the projects and people we work with. We then broke into separate training tracks for the remainder of the morning.

Our afternoon session consisted of more group breakout sessions on different topics pertaining to grant management, the tribal vocational rehabilitation process, and case management. We concluded the day discussing how we weave culture into our TVR projects. Many participants shared great ideas on culturally appropriate services.



Group team-building exercise

Day two was fantastic, starting out with an opening ceremony and prayer by Carmela Pablo from the Tohono O’odham Nation TVR Project. We began the training with a group activity called “AIVRS Jeopardy,” which turned out to be extremely competitive – our project staff certainly know their stuff when it comes to rules, regulations, and TVR services! There were so many who knew the correct answers to every question that we ended up with a tie for first place.

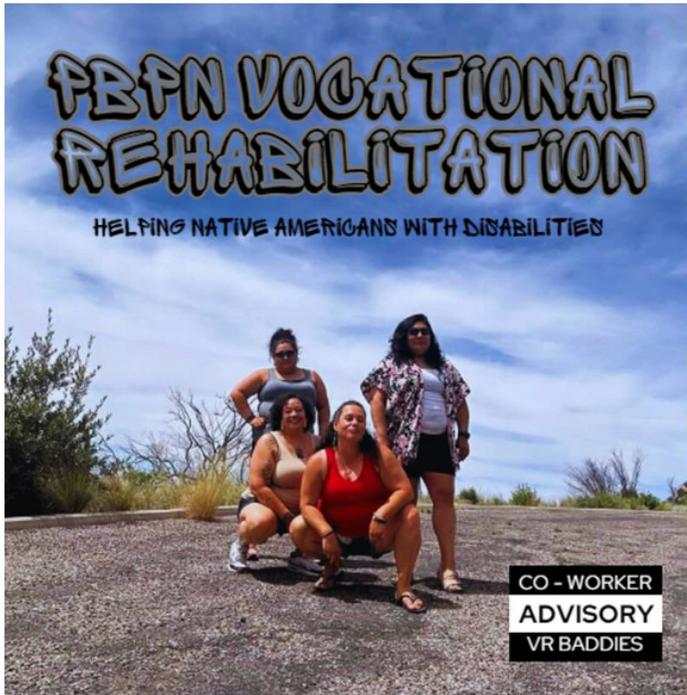
After our break, we viewed a presentation by Agnes Attaki and Rosa Franco, project director and project coordinator with the Native Initiatives program at the Sonoran Center for Excellence in Disabilities. The presentation helped us better understand the services provided by the Sonoran Center and how we can partner with them and other agencies to provide transition and other disability-related services. After lunch we participated in a large group activity on federal regulations. We concluded the day with a discussion on the importance of networking in vocational rehabilitation.

The final day began in a peaceful and serene way, with flute music and a beautiful slideshow reflecting our tribal cultures. Our opening ceremony and song were provided by Amy Juan, former Miss Tohono O’odham Nation. She sang beautifully and told us about working on her family’s ranch. We were invited to participate in an outdoor traditional healing ceremony held by Michael Encinas, with many people from the community joining our circle. We were then blessed to witness a beautiful basket dance by the Tohono O’odham Traditional Basket Dancers.

We would like to thank our hosts, the Tohono O’odham VR Program, and their director Melinda Hernandez and manager Stephanie Miguel. We heard so many stories about the accomplishments of AIVRS project staff and the individuals we work with. We left with pride for the work we all do representing our communities, projects, and tribal individuals with disabilities.



AIVRTTAC team presenting thank-you gifts to Tohono O’odham VR Program staff



AIVRTTAC is excited to announce the Prairie Band of Potawatomi VR Program's newest album... check our next newsletter for the upcoming tour dates!

AIVRTTAC Upcoming Event Schedule

COUNCIL OF STATE ADMINISTRATORS OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (CSAVR) CONFERENCE
OCTOBER 19 – 23RD

NATIONAL NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE AND NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS CELEBRATION
NOVEMBER 13TH 10-11:30 AM (ARIZONA MST)